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CONTENTS:

“Christian Influences on The Mabinogi”

Josh Pittman
Campbell University
Buies Creek, NC

page 1

“Anticipative Feminism in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s This Side of Paradise and Flappers and Philosophers”

Andrew Riccardo
Messiah College
Grantham, PA

page 26

“Vladimir Nabokov’s Singular Nature of Reality: A Close Reading of Despair and Bend Sinister”

Hannah Haejin Kim
Emory University
Atlanta, GA

page 58
Christian Influences On The Mabinogi

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The Mabinogion, specifically the Four Branches of The Mabinogi, is almost universally considered a sophisticated work of literature. As they would do for any well-developed work of art, critics analyze the Four Branches looking for themes and author-intended morals. These themes and morals, in turn, are developed mainly by parallels between and within Branches. Modern critical interpretations of The Mabinogi have emphasized themes arising from the well of Welsh mythology. However, certain similarities strongly suggest that the Christian narrative
dramatically influenced the redactor of *The Mabinogi*: parallels between Christ and various noble characters in the Welsh tales; a counter-cultural insistence upon the undesirability of violence; and a reverent treatment of the Otherworld all bespeak the Christian concerns of the redactor.

Catherine McKenna has remarked of the First Branch, Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, that it portrays a king coming to sovereignty and a king coming to wisdom. Both of these interpretations merit credence; however, a complete appreciation of these theories will include an appreciation of the similarity between *The Mabinogi* and *Beowulf* inasmuch as both seek to reconcile their cultural heritages with the new Christian religion. As J.R.R. Tolkien suggests of *Beowulf*, two contradictory influences play into *The Mabinogi*: “both new faith and new learning…and also a body of native tradition…for the changed mind to contemplate together” (71). The redactor of the Welsh tales, like the *Beowulf* poet, fully participates in neither the new Roman faith and learning nor the old Celtic tradition, “feeling [their worths] more poetically because he was himself removed” (73). That is, the redactor straddled the boundary between old and new, his proximity to each allowing him to appreciate their interplay, but his separation from each allowing him to view them with poetic nostalgia. Siewers also suggests this, calling the Four Branches “filled with both ancestral wisdom and ancient [C]hristian precedence” (196). Thus, although the Christian influences upon *The Mabinogi* are substantially demonstrated, this body of evidence will not in the least
lessen the importance to the text of the Welsh mythology noted by other scholars.

McKenna traces the mythological roots of Rhiannon, the magical wife of the First Branch’s protagonist, thus providing perhaps the most substantial support for the view that Pwyll is meant to recount a ruler’s rise to sovereignty. As the sovereignty goddess, Rhiannon is one “whose hand must be won by any aspirant to kingship.” Not only her “equine associations” but also “her supernatural power, her independent strong-mindedness in choosing a husband, and her superior wisdom” link her to other sovereignty goddesses, “such as the Irish Medb” (317). McKenna supports her argument soundly and convincingly; however, she overlooks other implications these allusions to a goddess may have had to a medieval Welsh audience. Rhiannon’s roots may be in Celtic mythology, but in the full bloom of *The Mabinogi*, her qualities also hearken to Christ.

The parallels between Rhiannon and Christ begin with the former’s first appearance in the story. When the main character, Pwyll, first sees Rhiannon, he beholds a creature clearly Otherworldly, if not divine. Thus, Rhiannon’s choosing to travel from her Otherworld home to Pwyll’s dominion makes her analogous to Christ, who alone “descended from heaven” (John 3:13). The fact that Rhiannon comes from the Otherworld to bestow sovereignty on Pwyll specifically by marriage strengthens this parallel. Similarly, Christ came to earth to restore man, “by the washing of water with the word” in order to make the Church, the Bride of Christ, “holy and blameless” (Eph.
Thus, Christ’s marriage to the Church gives men the ability to be “born again” (John 3:3) and to be made “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).

Rhiannon’s wisdom also reminds one of Christ. When Pwyll foolishly offers to give anything to his disguised rival suitor Gwawl, Rhiannon takes the blunder in stride. She accepts Pwyll’s foolish decision but proceeds to outwit Gwawl, beating him at his own game, so to speak. Thus, Pwyll gains the sovereignty goddess not through battle but by unexpected means, becoming for a time a lowly beggar (McKenna 316). Christ employed similar tactics in that He redeemed mankind by unexpected means. Instead of through battle, as Peter would have preferred, Christ saved His creation through His humiliation and death. He did not strike down Satan by an obvious display of power but, in a way, beat Satan at his own game, thereby allowing the sons of Adam to become sons of the King.

This kind of reversal of expectations occurs frequently in the Bible; the following are but a few examples. The prophet Elijah experienced the presence of the Most High God not in a fierce storm or an earthquake or a fire but in the “gentle blowing” that followed (1Kings 19:12). Jesus’ very birth as an unassuming child, related by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, reverses common expectations for the birth of an important person. The Sermon on the Mount asserts paradoxically that the downtrodden are blessed (Matt. 5). Jesus describes the salvation at the very heart of the Christian faith in self-contradictory terms: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 3:26).
12:32). Finally, the apostle Paul describes the resurrection of believers as a paradox: “That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15:36).

Rhiannon’s role as sovereignty goddess continues in Manawydan. In this branch, Rhiannon no longer embodies wisdom, as that role has switched to Manawydan’s character, but she does still have the power to bestow sovereignty. No longer does she choose her own husband, but marriage to her still awards Manawydan sovereignty over Pwyll’s old kingdom, Dyfed. This fact again reinforces the notion that the road to kingship passes through the rite of mortal marriage to the divine.

The fact that Pwyll must join the Otherworldly with the mortal through his unification with a euhemerized goddess brings to mind the concept of the Word becoming flesh propounded in the Gospel of John. In order to become a full regent, to become who he was meant to be, Pwyll must achieve reconciliation with the divine. Together, the human and the divine can ensure full protection and fertility to their people.

Just as Pwyll marries the Otherworldly Rhiannon for the good of his people, so Christ became human to provide salvation for His church. The Gospel of John asserts that “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14), and orthodox theologians have interpreted this to mean that Jesus was both the fully divine Son of God and the fully human Son of Man. St. Irenaeus says, “[N]or did He truly redeem us with His own blood, if He did not really become man” (chapter 2). The pivotal scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas also
writes, “Christ is said to be of heaven…either as to the virtue whereby it was formed; or even as to His very Godhead. But as to matter, Christ’s body was earthly” (2177). On the other hand, St. Anselm of Canterbury argues that Jesus must have been divine in order to effect the kind of salvation and “dignity” God intended for humanity (270). The mystery of Christ’s dual divinity and humanity recalls also the mystery of the Eucharist, in which, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the bread and wine literally turns into into the very body and blood of Christ, His “true body” (Aquinas 2428). Thus, just as the Eucharist, an all-important sacrament, must be both food and Christ’s body and blood, so Christ’s own incarnation must be both human and divine. Likewise, just as Christ combines in one body both mortal and immortal to effect the salvation of the human race, so Pwyll must secure his own union with the divine Rhiannon in order to bring about his people’s prosperity.

Rhiannon’s merciful reaction to Gwawl also makes her comparable to Christ. Whereas Pwyll and his men, after capturing the trickster, kick him until he has “received great bruises” (Mabinogion 16), Rhiannon convinces Pwyll to let Gwawl go after making the latter promise never to seek revenge for his bruises. Once again, Rhiannon demonstrates greater wisdom than Pwyll, this time because she recognizes the excellence of mercy.

Nevertheless, Pwyll’s initial lack of forgiveness does lead to unpleasant consequences for his son. The redactor reveals at the end of Manawydan that Pryderi, Pwyll’s son, and Rhiannon owe their abduction into the Otherworld to
Pwyll’s treatment of Gwawl in the First Branch. Likewise, when Gwawl’s servant Llwyd seeks revenge against Pwyll’s descendants, his lack of forgiveness almost results in his wife’s execution. In Branwen, the Irish nobles’ inability to forgive the temperamental Efnisien for insulting their king causes them to force the king to shun his new wife and Efnisien’s sister, Branwen. This shunning, in turn, leads to the invasion of Ireland by Branwen’s mighty brother Brandigeidfran and the virtual destruction of two countries. The Christian virtues of forgiveness and mercy, then, play an indispensable role in keeping the peace.

The Christian emphasis on mercy and forgiveness is almost axiomatic. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in which He paints a picture of the Christian life, pronounces blessings on both the merciful and the peacemakers (Matt. 5:7, 9). Later, Jesus tells a parable of a servant forgiven of a large debt to his master. This same servant then abuses and threatens a fellow servant who owes him much less money than he owed his master. Upon hearing of this, the master promptly throws the first servant into prison. Jesus concludes the parable with these words: “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35). Having been forgiven of their sins by God, Christians are expected to forgive others, not only seven times but also the symbolic “seventy times seven times” (Matt. 18:22)—that is, indefinitely. Christians must show forgiveness because “judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). Manawydan demonstrates perfectly
the superiority of mercy over judgment by using mercy to set the world aright again.

The concept of forgiveness, or the lack thereof, also greatly affects the Four Branches in that it colors the redactor’s portrayal of violence. The First Branch begins with low-key violence as Pwyll does battle with his Otherworldly foe Hafgan. Several aspects of this contest warrant inquiry. First, battle is, by implication, a just way of establishing hegemony in Annwn, the Otherworld kingdom to which Pwyll is sent. This has one of two possible implications for the rest of the Four Branches. If the redactor accepts battle as an acceptable way of gaining a kingdom, perhaps he does not actually condemn the terrible violence of Math, and perhaps his claim in that Branch that Caswallan has done Manawydan wrong is hypocritical. On the other hand, the battle in Annwn takes place between Pwyll and Hafgan only, as opposed to between two whole armies. A comparable concept controls Pwyll’s charge—he must only deal Hafgan a single stroke. Taken together, these two details extol mitigated violence. The moral seems to be that belligerents must control their violence responsibly. The terror of the rest of the battles in the Four Branches, then, arises from their overshooting Aristotle’s target of the golden mean. After all, the final peace between the kingdoms of Math and Pryderi follows a one-on-one duel between Pryderi and the sorcerer Gwydion.

The historical context of The Mabinogi adds significance to the theme of mitigated violence. Written probably between A.D. 1060 and 1100 (Charles-Edwards 44), the text
came into its own in a country under the sway of the Roman Catholic Church. Siewers assesses Welsh culture at the time as undergoing “conversion to [C]hristianity in a period and manner that fostered construction of cultural continuity with ancestral traditions of the land” (198). The Catholic Church perpetually fought to limit the medieval European culture of war, instituting regulations such as the Peace of God and the Truce of God, and *the Mabinogi* redactor undoubtedly absorbed this concern with peace.

Ideally, the Peace of God “was to place under special ecclesiastical protection certain classes of persons, such as monks, the clergy, and the poor” (Cowdrey 42). Initiated about a generation after the Peace (42), the Truce, first proclaimed in 1027, forbade all violence on certain days, originally Sunday (44). Cowdrey does well explaining the difference between the two legislations: “Whereas the Peace sought to protect certain classes and their goods at all times, the Truce was an attempt to stop all violence at certain times” (44). The author calls the Truce “part of churchmen’s endeavors to propagate peace” (44).

Churchmen had concerned themselves with propagating peace for a long time. Jesus’ teachings of forgiveness and turning the other cheek obviously influenced the Church’s position on violence, but by the eleventh century, the Church no longer accepted complete pacifism. The tradition of Christian limited war had influenced mainstream Christian thought since St. Augustine (Johnson 14) although just war did not become “systematic” until the time of Catholic monk and lawyer Gratian in “the middle of the twelfth century”
The Mabinogi redactor’s focus on limiting violence, then, fits into the Catholic trend of curbing the violent medieval way of life, specifically during the eleventh century, as well as into the Biblical theme of encouraging “the peacekeepers.”

Violence also relates to the motif of travel. One critic points out that danger often accompanies travel in the Four Branches (Jones 214). Pwyll stays mostly within his own realm, and most travel in Math entails war. Likewise, the journeys of the Irish king Matholwch and the giant king Brandigeidfran result in a war that decimates two nations. Less catastrophically but still eerily, the characters in Manawydan are threatened with violence and death wherever they go in the foreign land of Lloegyr (Jones 214-215). In an age less mobile than the modern, travel probably did usually originate from either displacement or belligerent ambition. A footnote in Siewers’s article relates that in the eleventh century, self-consciousness of being a distinct people from their Anglo-Saxon neighbors was just beginning to creep into the minds of the Welsh (196). Foreigners, like the Normans and Vikings, invaded from outside the bounds of Wales, and the Welsh who moved were forced to do so by the invaders. The Welsh, then, traveled under the compunction of others’ lust for their land.

The aversion to violence evident in The Mabinogi stands in contrast to the celebration of martial force found in comparable texts such as Beowulf and Judith. Although some critics have posited good arguments suggesting that Beowulf propounds a nuanced conception of violence, the poet
certainly does not emphasize forgiveness to the extent the *Mabinogi* redactor does. One critic argues that violence in *Beowulf* performs the function of justice and is illegitimately exercised when used, for example, to settle feuds (Hill 37). However, the culture of the poem has deep roots in tribal loyalties, which call for the destruction of one’s relatives’ enemies. *Beowulf*, for instance, boasts of having “avenged the Geats (their enemies brought it / upon themselves)” (*Beowulf* 423-424). Thus, the *Beowulf* poet seems to approve of feuds if they meet certain criteria; that is, one may engage in feuding if his enemies bring the feud “upon themselves.” The poet does not clearly state how one calls feud violence upon himself, but it seems that *Beowulf* accepts violence to an extent that the *Mabinogi* redactor never would. Although feuding under certain conditions sounds like the doctrine of just war, *Beowulf* differs from *The Mabinogi* in that it sees no solution to the cyclical violence of the age. Upon the death of the poem’s hero, his people stand in an unenviable position, “anticipating raids and revenge-feud on three sides” (Hill 61). *Beowulf* makes no mention of an ultimate divine justification of human deeds, no reassurance that peace will eventually triumph—indeed, much of the poem’s beauty stems from this despair. *The Mabinogi*, on the other hand, upholds limited violence and even forgiveness. Both Pryderi and Brandigeidfran die in the end, but their deaths result from foolish decisions which greater wisdom (on Pryderi’s part) or forgiveness (on the parts of Efnisien and the Irish nobles) would have prevented, and the conflicts in the story do ultimately come to an end.
Similarly, Judith has no mention of mercy. Rather, the reader is not to question the evil character of the villain Holofernes, and Judith owes her position as a laudable heroine to her very lack of equivocation concerning her assassination of Holofernes. Indeed, Judith invokes God’s mercy only to ask for strength to kill “the heathen man” (98). Also in “Cynewulf and Cyneheard,” none of the characters even considers forgiveness an option. Because the king, Sigeberht, has committed “unjust acts,” Cynewulf overthrows him and sets about establishing his own hegemony. When the previous king’s brother, Cyneheard, becomes a problem, Cynewulf seeks to kill him. Lastly, upon hearing of the death of their king and kinsman, Cyneheard’s knights reject offers of truce from Cynewulf, instead choosing to kill the usurper and all but one of his men (37-38).

Although the prospect is tempting, one must not dismissively attribute the conceptions of violence in *The Mabinogi* to its national origins. That is, the redactor of the Four Branches did not lose his taste for violence because he was a sore loser. Even other Welsh literature shows signs of glorifying violence—including the other tales of *The Mabinogion*. For example, Culhwch and Olwen contains an epic description of Culhwch’s arms (*Mabinogion* 97), a list of Culhwch’s ancestors (100-107), and a catalogue of the feats of Arthur’s knights (107-108). These knights’ fame derives from their martial prowess; Bedwyr, for example, “though he was one-handed no three warriors drew blood in the same field faster than he” (108).

Clearly, *The Mabinogi* came to bloom in a sanguinary
culture dangling somewhere between the tribal days of *Beowulf* and the feudal times of the Arthurian romances. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of violence in its society—even within the physical bindings of *The Mabinogion*—the redactor of the Four Branches asserts a counter-cultural aversion to violence and preference for creative pacifism. Whereas the predominant literary culture apparently did not provide him with this influence, Christian tradition certainly has the potential to have instilled just war tendencies in an author of folk stories. Given the other parallels between the Christian narrative and the Four Branches, Christianity very likely had a much larger influence upon *The Mabinogi* redactor’s views than paganism or contemporary culture.

Returning to Rhiannon, one next notices that “teachers and wise men” (*Mabinogion* 19) sentence her to carry travelers on her back in penance for a crime she did not commit. In the same way, Christ’s ultimate show of humility began when He, though innocent, was condemned to die. Even the Roman official responsible for His condemnation, Pilate, declares to the Jews who want Jesus killed, “[N]othing deserving death has been done by Him” (Luke 23:15). His passion and death express most fully His mission to bear the burdens of humanity. Thus, just as Christ acts as a Christian’s bridge to the Father’s presence, the “one mediator…between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5), so Rhiannon’s humility—or humiliation—allows her to carry travelers to the king.

The theme of self-sacrifice, though present in Rhiannon’s tale, emerges more explicitly in the Second Branch. Branwen
begins the self-sacrificial peacemaking process by allowing herself to be given in marriage to Matholwch. By marrying the Irish king, she leaves the presence of her brother, whose great stature clearly identifies him as a partially divine character. She, like Christ, leaves the presence of the King to live with those of lesser greatness and effect peace between the two realms. Of course, Branwen does not completely fulfill a Christ type because she, by her own confession, causes the destruction of two islands. Unlike Christ, who “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Philip. 2:8), Branwen calls her brother to rescue her by invading Ireland—with tragic consequences.

Efnisien also exhibits self-sacrifice in Branwen. Although throughout most of the story he maliciously causes trouble, Efnisien redeems himself in the end through self-sacrifice. Because the Irish possess the cauldron of rebirth, the war Efnisien causes threatens to annihilate his countrymen; however, after realizing his guilt, he throws himself into the cauldron and breaks it, simultaneously breaking his own heart. In this way, Efnisien leaves the story, and the mortal world, as a good character. Though not innocent like Christ, Efnisien does make a Christ-like sacrifice.

Brandigeidfran undeniably provides the most explicit Christ type in the Second Branch, however. Throughout the story, Brandigeidfran excels in his role as a righteous, generous king. He gives his sister to Matholwch in order to make peace, he compensates Matholwch much past what the insult requires when Efnisien offends the Irish king,
and he attacks Ireland only in defense of the helpless. His willingness to make peace mirrors God’s willingness to reconcile man to Himself by giving His Son in marriage to His redeemed Church. Brandigeidfran’s generosity ties him not only to the ideal king of Anglo-Saxon tradition (whom Beowulf would call the “ring-giver” [1486]) but also to the Christian virtues of forgiveness and mercy that Pwyll so conspicuously lacks. His willingness to forgive has the capacity to end the possible hostility between his kingdom and Ireland, except that the Irish nobles keep their grudge and pressure Matholwch to punish Branwen. He again attempts to preclude violence through forgiveness when the Irish build a house for him and promise to let his nephew reign in Matholwch’s stead, but Efnisien kills the child. Indeed, the hostilities begin in the first place only because of Brandigeidfran’s need to protect Branwen from her persecutors. Thus, Brandigeidfran gives generously, forgives, protects, and tries to make peace—all Christ-like activities a ruler should imitate.

The most Christ-like of Brandigeidfran’s laudable qualities, however, is his self-sacrifice. When a spear in the foot—a possible reference to Achilles or even to Eve’s descendant’s being bruised on the heel (Gen. 3:15)—begins to sap the life from him, the king commands his friends to cut off his head and bury it in London, facing France. As long as it remains under the soil of London, the head will protect the island from invasion. The king’s sacrifice, therefore, saves a multitude of his subjects from external malice. In the same way, Christ submitted to execution for
the sake of His followers (John 10:18). The salvation He offers does not depend on His staying buried; rather, Paul cites His resurrection as the proof of His saving power (1 Cor. 15:14). Still, as the Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23), the risen Jesus protects Christians from the malice of Satan, who seeks to devour Christians like a lion (1 Peter 5:8).

To return for the last time to Rhiannon, one notices the manner of the queen’s reinstatement. She regains her innocence and rightful place at the king’s side only after the return of her son. Likewise, “because of the suffering of death,” Christ is “crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). In other words, having secured salvation for His followers, Christ received the glory He had before His incarnation. Both Christ and Rhiannon suffer vicarious punishment for sins they did not commit, and both regain their former glories after their suffering.

Despite numerous parallels, one major discrepancy makes Rhiannon different from Christ, namely their genders. A male-dominated society would have frowned upon referring to Christ as a woman. However, a few precedents blunt the importunity of such reference. Firstly, Christ refers to Himself as a mother hen in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 13:34). Secondly, an ancient Hebrew tradition identifies wisdom as female; Proverbs personifies Wisdom as a woman who stands in the streets and cries out (Prov. 1). Christ, as logos (John 1), and Rhiannon may both be considered wisdom personified. Thus, there can be no absolute ban on referring to Christ as female.
McKenna’s mention of Rhiannon’s wisdom leads to an analysis of the comparative wisdom of other characters in the Four Branches, the first of whom is Pwyll. McKenna interprets the whole First Branch as Pwyll’s journey toward wisdom as a result of Arawn’s lessons (321-323), and a footnote reports that Pwyll’s name means “Sense” (*Mabinogion* 23). Indeed, Pwyll’s and Pryderi’s stories dramatize patterns of foolishness and wisdom rather strongly.

Pwyll first appears as a foolishly prideful prince driving another’s dogs away from a stag and taking the animal for himself. Certainly, as Arawn’s reaction shows, Pwyll acts foolishly in this. The prince soon redeems himself, however, by obeying Arawn’s requests. He shows his discerning side both by refusing to strike Hafgan more than once and by refusing to sleep with Arawn’s wife. His wisdom in these two areas earns him the title Head of Annwn as well as friendship with Arawn that benefits Pryderi even after Pwyll’s death. As Gantz highlights, the second episode of the First Branch repeats this pattern of selfish pride followed by more discerning wisdom (267). In the second episode, after the exposition in which Pwyll meets Rhiannon, Pwyll foolishly promises too much to Gwawl. He again has the chance to redeem himself, however, by following Rhiannon’s instructions. Having captured Gwawl, instead of demonstrating increased humility, Pwyll once more behaves proudly, treating Gwawl with unnecessary cruelty. Once again, Rhiannon’s instructions curb Pwyll’s lack of mercy and allow him to escape retaliation—though his son will still
bear the vengeance for this act. Gantz overlooks, however, the important manifestation of Pwyll’s foolishness when the prince first meets Rhiannon. Instead of taking the sensible approach and calling out to her, Pwyll proudly sends his fastest horses after Rhiannon. Indeed, when he finally does admit that he cannot overtake her, Rhiannon chides him, saying it would have been better for his horses if he had simply asked earlier.

In each of these episodes, Pwyll’s pride informs his foolishness and threatens to come before his fall. He claims Arawn’s stag presumably because he assumes no one outranking him would hunt in his dominions (McKenna 322). He fails to call out to Rhiannon because his pride will not allow him to admit he cannot catch her. Infected by the headiness of pride, he promises Gwawl whatever the other would ask. Finally, proud of having caught Gwawl, he tortures his vanquished enemy without considering the possibility that he may start a feud. Foolishness and pride, then, are linked inextricably.

Pwyll’s willingness to humble himself and obey directions provides him with freedom from the consequences of his pride in each episode. He obeys Arawn’s injunction not to strike Hafgan twice, Rhiannon’s suggestion on how to catch Gwawl, and Rhiannon and her father’s plea not to kill Gwawl in a bag. He meets Rhiannon only after he humbles himself enough to admit he cannot catch her. In the final episode of the First Branch, his humility leads him to obey the wishes of his nobles—now that he has learned from Arawn how to obey others (McKenna 323)—who worry he
will have no heir.

Pryderi suffers from a similar character flaw. His pride first manifests itself when, in Lloegyr, he wants to fight the tradesmen who plot to kill him and Manawydan. As Manawydan informs him, fighting would only provoke the authorities to imprison them. Nevertheless, each time the tradesmen conspire against the two main characters, Pryderi wants to stand and fight. Also, when a strange castle appears where there had been no castle before, Pryderi proudly rushes in after his dogs, possibly desiring to prove his lordship over the lands he hunts. In fact, he proves nothing but his impetuosity.

If Pryderi inherits his father’s flaws, he also inherits Pwyll’s redeeming characteristics of generosity and friendship. Pryderi’s initial gifts to Manawydan of Rhiannon as wife and Dyfed as property guarantee Manawydan’s loyalty throughout the story—a loyalty which saves Pryderi from both starvation and exile to the Otherworld. The redactor never shows Pryderi humble himself. Instead, Pryderi rashly trades, against his agreement with Arawn, all the pigs he has received from Annwn for the apparitional creatures fashioned by the scheming sorcerer Gwydion, thus bringing his dynasty to an end.

Manawydan, on the other hand, exemplifies patient humility. Though the cousin of Brandigeidfran, he claims no right to the throne when he returns to Wales from Ireland, just as Christ came into the world humbly. Despite his noble birth, he does not disdain to work as a cobbler, shield maker, or saddle maker—nor would he have refused work
as a carpenter, one assumes. When the tradesmen of Lloegyr plot to kill him, he does not take umbrage but recognizes his vulnerability and flees. When his dogs chase an unusual-looking boar into a castle that has appeared overnight, he does not rashly charge in but holds back. When he has caught one of the mice that have been destroying his wheat and a succession of clerics tries to persuade him to release the mouse, he refuses and presses his advantage until he has gained what he wants. In contrast to Pwyll, he knows instinctively to demand that Llwyd not take vengeance upon him. In all these situations, Manawydan shows discretion clearly the opposite of Pwyll's and Pryderi’s impetuosity.

The importance of humility in Christianity is almost impossible to overemphasize. From the very birth of Christ in a manger (Luke 2) to His baptism by His inferior (Matt. 3:13-15) and His ignominious death as a criminal, Jesus preferred accepting a humble role to exercising His divine power. Indeed, the Apostle Paul admonishes the Philippians to imitate Christ, who took “the form of a bondservant” and “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Philip. 2:7, 8). Not only did Christ Himself accept ignominy, but He frequently encouraged His followers to humble themselves. His Sermon on the Mount proclaims, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Similarly, He later takes a small child in His arms and says, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). He also states at one point, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be
exalted” (Luke 14:11). James also says, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (James 4:10).

This necessity of humility is underscored not only in the New Testament but also in the Old. Throughout the Old Testament, God exalts the humble while humiliating the proud. To teach this lesson, He even curses King Nebuchadnezzar to spend seven years living as a beast (Daniel 5:20-21). God also commands the Israelites, through Moses, to spend a day of every year atoning for their sins, so that they would “humble [their] souls” (Lev. 16:29, 31). Even King Ahab, a classic example of an evil king, averts God’s judgment by humbling himself: “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days” (1 Kings 21:29). In summarizing His activities to Job, God says that He will “Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him” (Job 40:12). The Psalms frequently express hope that God will bless the humble. For example, Psalm 37:11 declares, “But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.”

The redactor of The Mabinogi internalizes the concept of humility so central to Biblical righteousness and seems to imply that interactions with the Otherworld require the humility praised by the Biblical writers. Only humility saves Pwyll from Arawn’s wrath and causes him to become Head of Annwn; humility establishes Pwyll as a just king after his identity trade with Arawn; only with humility could he meet
Rhiannon; and humility allows him to become respected enough that Teyrnon is willing to return Pryderi (McKenna 325-326). In each of these cases, Pwyll’s encounter with the Otherworld has a positive outcome only when the king shows humility.

Properly applied, this principle will also govern interactions with the Christian God. In his essay on *The Mabinogi* as a “Welsh Old Testament” (196), Siewers argues medieval monasticism led to an “appreciation of the role of the physical in spiritual life” so that ecclesiastic sites became Otherworld portals (198). In this euhemerizing of the land, the Celtic creativity that gave rise to the myths of the gods channeled its creativity into mythologizing Christianity. Thus, what once symbolized ambiguous connections to a mythical world of magic now came to symbolize connections to the Christian God; from a Roman perspective, the Celts incorporated Christian churches into their eccentric worldview. Given this tendency of medieval Celtic minds, it is likely that the redactor of *The Mabinogi* applies the necessity of reverence in interaction with the Otherworld to interactions with the Christian God. That is, he uses his mythology to instill in his audience reverence for the spiritual, which in his time would mean reverence for the Catholic Church. After all, the Church alone had the power to grant or deny salvation through the sacraments. Although written after *The Mabinogi*, Pope Boniface VIII’s papal bull *Unam Sanctam* expresses this idea well: “there is one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, outside of which there is neither salvation nor remission of sins.” Any Welshman who
aspired to heaven, then, would do well to treat the Church with reverence.

A careful analysis of the comparisons and contrasts implied by *The Mabinogi*’s repeated variations on recurring situations and character traits reveals a strong Christian influence that is commonly overlooked in favor of pagan influences. Rhiannon’s character, in its implications of human unity with the divine, strongly supports the parallel with Christ. The three self-sacrificial characters in Branwen and their implications for the redactor’s view of violence in Math, extol Christ-like qualities, especially in rulers. The depiction of violence, much more likely influenced by Christianity than by paganism, particularly emphasizes forgiveness and mercy. Finally, Pwyll’s and Pryderi’s foolishness, contrasted with Manawydan’s exemplary wisdom, displays the necessity of reverence for spiritual matters. All these characteristics and attributes and their moral lessons make *The Mabinogi* an example of Christ’s fulfillment of the Celtic concept of divinity.
Works Cited


Anticipative Feminism in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 
This Side of Paradise and Flappers and Philosophers

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“Y ou’ve got a lot of courage to carry around a pink book,” my friend said to me one day. She referred to the paperback of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Flappers and Philosophers clasped loosely in my hand, back cover awash in fuchsia, front adorned with the portrait of a lady staring moodily off into the distance. Some might have reckoned the design merely the isolated interpretation of the good people at Pocket Books, paying the matter no second thought. A quick scan over my other Fitzgerald books, however, revealed a steady trend. My Barnes &
Noble edition of *The Beautiful and Damned* bathed itself in soft pink hues, while others dressed themselves in violet elegance.

A commercially-minded reading of Fitzgerald might lend itself toward exploiting the stereotypically romantic side of his work. Compared to writing friend Ernest Hemingway’s terse grunts on bullfighting, Fitzgerald comes off markedly more loquacious and sentimental. His short stories fill themselves with young insecure adolescents and haughty debutantes. Keeping this in mind, I never felt intimidated by the publishers’ decision to feminize the exterior of Fitzgerald texts. When I was younger, I had enough blind faith in my masculine interpretation of Fitzgerald to disregard interpretations of him which said otherwise. I related strongly to the picaresque, boyhood image of Fitzgerald; men often play the role of hero in Fitzgerald’s novels. Frequently, the conflicts of his novels involve said males feeling profoundly slighted by their female counterparts, forced to deal with the trauma of feminine betrayal. At times, his female characters can come across less deserving of sympathy. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan ultimately chooses the boorish Tom over the titular Jay. In *Tender is the Night*, Dick and Nicole Divers’ marriage disintegrates—she running off with family friend Tommy Barban. In Fitzgerald’s final unfinished piece, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, protagonist Monroe Stahr’s fall from Hollywood production power is precipitated in part by the entrance of his star-crossed love interest Kathleen Moore. Though readings evoking empathy with or attributing moral
high ground to males hardly stand as the absolute aesthetic responses all readers glean from Fitzgerald, I did not have to look far to find people who interpreted him in “my” way. Even my own brother, who had read only Fitzgerald’s “Winter Dreams” in high school, suggested discussing the story in this paper, since character Judy Jones “is a real [expletive]” to protagonist Dexter Green.

However, as my worldview continues to broaden and I meet vantage points completely antithetical to my own, I have to reevaluate the decision to clothe Fitzgerald in a flowery dress. Perhaps the front of Flappers and Philosophers contains an idly sitting woman not merely to sell a classic to the female demographic but because she truly belongs there. One critic has said that studying the “gender implications” of Fitzgerald’s texts has made him question the notion of Fitzgerald as “anti-feminist” (Schiff 2659). Another critic argued that the earlier mentioned Judy Jones of “Winter Dreams” has been “consistently misread and woefully shortchanged” as “irresponsible,” claiming she is “so subtle and probing that… hasty commentators miss the point entirely” (Martin 161, 160). When scrutinizing Fitzgerald from outside a hyper-masculine lens, I begin to concede that his male characters are not always blameless. Perhaps his female characters ought to be vindicated for their actions, empowered as they are through the demeanor and choice Fitzgerald grants them, even if he grants them such liberty unconsciously. Was Fitzgerald anticipating future decades’ heightened standards for gender equality? When readers orient Fitzgerald’s work in the context of
mid-twentieth century feminist ideals and ethics, his unwitting anticipation of feminist goals hardly seems an ill-fitting stretch.

Of course, if people posit that an author anticipates later feminist aims, then they must provide a better definition for how they intend to use the word and fully explain the cultural context, historical period, and particular movement from which they draw the term. Unless otherwise noted, the term “feminism” will refer in this paper to second-wave feminism. First-wave feminism refers to the movement which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and spanned roughly until 1920, associated with figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott (Dicker 21, 29). While members of this wave would lobby and petition for equal educational opportunities for both genders, reproductive rights, Prohibition, and wardrobe liberties, they would predominantly fight for political equality in the form of women’s suffrage, culminating in the United States with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (Dicker 26, 31, 52, 54). This landmark achievement marked the close of the first wave.

In contradistinction, second-wave feminism began roughly in the early 1960s, as women began to realize the long-term effects of leaving their World War II factory jobs and returning to their roles as wives and housekeepers. Feeling suddenly unable to find satisfaction in the domestic sphere, many women pressed not only for the minimum political equality they achieved during feminism’s first wave but also for sociological, economic, occupational, and
psychological equality as well (Dicker 57). Second-wave feminists touted the slogan “the personal is political” and strove to “extend the meaning of ‘the political’ to include areas of social life previously treated as ‘personal’ and positioned in the private realm of the household” (Mack-Canty 154). Such feminists sought a holistic equality that overarched all aspects of practical life and daily pertinent decision-making, not simply equality on an abstract, constitutional level. Their aims reached beyond the mere transcendence of Victorian gender norms from which the first-wave members endeavored to disentangle themselves.

Among important second-wave feminists, Betty Friedan stood out as the prominent leader of the movement. Few voices were louder or more influential than hers for spurring the second movement and fighting for female equality beyond the minimum. She shed light on the various cultural discrepancies that existed between men and women despite the successful attainment of women’s suffrage. Occupational opportunities remained at a minimum for women, while the monetary compensation they received was laughably small compared to that of men. Though Friedan’s actions while heading up the National Organization for Women could come off militant at times (such as the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality), readers should keep in mind the mid-twentieth century context in which she lived, one in which the term “domestic violence” did not yet exist in terms of husband-on-wife spousal abuse (Dicker 57-58). As recently as a few decades ago, women had not attained the legal protection they have today.
For the purposes of this paper, however, one must further differentiate use of the term “feminism” from its third-wave and “postfeminist” connotations. Those women born in recent decades of the 80s, 90s, or beyond, who believe second-wave feminism achieved its goals and therefore render any need for further feminist movements useless, have been dubbed members of the “[p]ost-feminist [g]eneration” (Dicker 107). Those who identify themselves as feminists today largely focus their efforts on issues of inequality involving women in particularized fields, women of other races, or women of other sexual orientations (Dicker 110, 124). Such women are said to belong to third-wave feminism.

Having feminism posited in its second-wave category, one must note that this paper will chiefly concern Fitzgerald’s role as an anticipative, proto-second-wave feminist in his early works, such as his first novel, This Side of Paradise, and his first collection of short stories, Flappers and Philosophers. This Side of Paradise covers the young life of protagonist Amory Blaine. The first part of the novel progresses from his early migrant childhood experiences with his mother Beatrice and prep school woes to his intellectual and social development at Princeton and brief stint in World War I. Fitzgerald scatters boyish, romantic misadventures all along the way. The second half depicts the adult Amory falling in love with debutante Rosalind Connage, only to find their relationship break apart, leaving him restless and wandering, trying to make sense of his fractured world. The novel comes to a close with his
memorable epiphany “I know myself… but that is all” (260). Fitzgerald’s corresponding book of short stories from this era, *Flappers and Philosophers*, features works dealing with similar themes of youth. Young men and women coping with the relational, social, economic, and political issues of coming of age in the late 1910s litter its pages.

People need not take too lengthy a pan over the shelves containing Fitzgerald studies at any college library to notice the overwhelming majority of scholarship on his famous novel *The Great Gatsby*. His late masterpiece *Tender is the Night* has also merited copious scholarship, recent examples of which include pieces by Michael Nowlin and Tiffany Johnson. Later short stories “The Rich Boy” and “Babylon Revisited” also receive due praise. However, the author’s earliest work often does not receive such critical attention. When critics do turn their attention to *This Side of Paradise*, they tend to stress its historical value, relationship to the author’s biography, and the vagaries of its composition (an example being James L. West’s work). The scholarship the book typically receives often highlights the novel’s blaring structural deficiencies or the errors that early editions contained due to negligent editing. Notable Fitzgerald critic Matthew J. Bruccoli writes that “[m]uch has been said about [his] illiteracy, and *This Side of Paradise* has been singled out as the worst offender” (263). In a study of Fitzgerald’s imagery, Dan Seitzers sees “few recognizable patterns” in the author’s debut work, emphasizing Fitzgerald’s “youth and inexperience” and “anxiety to get his novel published so that fame and fortune” would follow (15).
A corresponding disparity exists among his short stories; the later works receive far more praise despite his early stories’ popularity. Andrew Turnbull summarizes such scholarly consensus: “The critics, on the whole, did not feel the collection [Flappers and Philosophers] fulfilled the promise of This Side of Paradise. They warned of slick commercialism, an adman’s glamour, and Fitzgerald’s cocky tone seemed of a piece with his errors in grammar and syntax” (234). However, his early work provides the strongest evidence regarding his often overlooked feminist sentiments; This Side of Paradise and some of his short stories were penned prior to his marriage to Zelda Sayre, keeping readers from simply explaining away his early female characters’ strong wills or potentially cold demeanors as the mere mirroring of his tumultuous and “emasculating” marriage (Nowlin 63). Moreover, some of his early material was drafted as early as 1917, prior to the close of World War I, the advent of the Roaring Twenties, and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving readers a less culturally contaminated picture of the author than is commonly offered by The Great Gatsby (West 3). Ultimately, his early prose received far less revision and therefore contains far fewer walls built up between author and audience, affording readers a more candid (albeit raw and undeveloped) Fitzgerald.

When taking into account Fitzgerald’s potential feminism, it becomes important to situate him in his Jazz Age historical context and to use this knowledge to explain the insufficiency of proving him a first-wave feminist. In the
post-Great War era through which Fitzgerald completed the majority of his writing, a profound moral “disillusionment” had permeated Western culture due to the recent devastation witnessed in World War I. Increasingly, people began to push the boundaries of previously implacable Victorian norms for sexuality and behavior, feeling traditional values had failed them (Newton-Matza 152). Of course, vast social structures such as Victorian morality can hardly be toppled as the result of a single war, however massive and unprecedented its scope. A disparity still existed between how men and women could behave sexually (150). Embracing the liberality of the new era and opposing traditional sentiment from the previous century, many young women of the early 1920s began bobbing their hair and wearing flat clothing antithetical to Victorian female dress: “the new woman, the flapper” (Prigozy 131). Flappers of the Jazz Age stood independent, “shameless, selfish, and honest… tak[ing] a man’s point of view as her mother never could” (131). Fitzgerald’s work was certainly influenced by the era in which he wrote. Despite having his early novel and short story collection published in 1920 before the zenith of the Roaring Twenties’ opulence, I understand the foolishness of not acknowledging the complex interplay that Fitzgerald not only had on his culture but also his culture had on him (West 3). However, his conception of feminism that appears in his work should not be understood as predominantly first-wave feminism in nature. Proving such an assertion would be nothing more than nodding a yes to the question of whether he was profoundly influenced
by his time. By proving Fitzgerald as a prophet of the later values of second-wave feminism, one attributes a transformative agency to Fitzgerald, a level of heightened respect that calling him only a first-wave feminist would deny him. Considering the associations his early work has with the era of the flapper revolution circa 1922, the economic prosperity of the decade, or the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, proving such works as bearing proto-second-wave feminist sympathies would demonstrate Fitzgerald’s transcendence of his zeitgeist’s mere influence (interestingly, some critics even have attributed the “creation of the flapper” construct as we understand it today as an invention of the author himself) (Way 61). When readers orient Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* and *Flappers and Philosophers* retrospectively through the lens of second-wave feminist aims and ethics, keeping in consideration the insecurities Fitzgerald shouldered, they can interpret him in feminist terms.

Let us first consider the correlations between his stories and Betty Friedan’s works. Friedan’s most groundbreaking and memorable book remains her 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan used this work as a mouthpiece to rail against mid-twentieth century American culture’s expectation for young women to aspire only to be “[t]he suburban housewife… healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home,” thereby supposedly finding “true feminine fulfillment” (18). The scenarios of Fitzgerald’s early works express an understanding of this lack of fulfillment which would come
to the public’s attention decades later. His early characters exemplify a deep female longing for more from life.

Late in *This Side of Paradise*, for example, emotionally fragile Amory Blaine stumbles upon Eleanor Savage whilst sauntering about the Maryland countryside (207). Fitzgerald introduces this new character to readers in the midst of Amory’s prolonged and chronic convalescence after Rosalind Connage breaks off their engagement. Eleanor serves as a love interest, therapeutic friend, and conversational other to Amory. Discussing poetry and philosophy, Eleanor not only posits her desires in juxtaposition to the lingering Victorian expectations of women in her day but also serves as soothsayer to the demands which would be placed on females by the advent of second-wave feminism:

‘Rotten, rotten world,’ broke out Eleanor suddenly, ‘and the wretchedest thing is me- oh, why am I a girl? Why am I not stupid? Look at you; you’re stupider than I am, not much but some, and you can lope about and get bored and then lope somewhere else, and you can play around with girls without being involved in meshes of sentiment, and you can do anything and be justified- and here am I with the brains to do everything, yet tied to the sinking ship of future matrimony. If I were born a hundred years from now, well and good, but now what’s in store for me- I have to marry that goes without saying. Who? I’m too bright for most men, yet I have to descend to their level and let them patronize my intellect to get
their attention. Every year that I don’t marry I’ve got less chance for a first-class man.’ (219)

Astutely, Fitzgerald employs Eleanor’s character to address other issues of inequality women faced in the 1910s and 20s, issues which would remain present even by feminism’s second-wave era. Friedan discusses the lengths women would go to in order to procure potential suitors: taking on multiple jobs, treating higher education exclusively as an arena by which to find a husband (16, 25). In some cases, women experienced extreme psychological and emotional duress due to the pressure society put on them to become housewives and mothers, requiring psychiatric treatment or therapy (19, 25). Eleanor bears witness to this pressure. At the apex of her confessional rant, she steers the horse that she has been riding toward a cliff and nearly falls over the edge, jumping off the horse just in the nick of time (221). Though this scene may appear markedly melodramatic to readers today, Fitzgerald was attempting to demonstrate the earnest desperation of women in his generation, revealing society’s need for a wave of feminism more radical than that of the first-wavers of his time.

Although, with her hyperbolic language, Eleanor’s character can come off as immature or unrealistic, if taken as a proto-second-wave exponent of feminine neurosis concerning the “problem that has no name” (Friedan 19), then readers do more than excuse her; they empathize with her. Some might deem that her characterization and overall demeanor nullify any feminist prophecy she represents. However, as James L.W. West III argues, Fitzgerald created
Eleanor’s character in a “salvaged” portion of *The Romantic Egotist*, an unpublished novel which he completed prior to *This Side of Paradise* (68). If critics have complained of the disparity in quality between *The Great Gatsby* and *This Side of Paradise*, then one can understand the disparity which must exist between the latter and *The Romantic Egotist*. When Fitzgerald wrote Eleanor into existence, his writing had not yet developed the level of polish it would later receive; Eleanor’s representing the “woman question” insightfully in spite of her flaws and her creator’s inexperience speaks to her credibility.

Threads of proto-Friedan ideas also reveal themselves in Fitzgerald’s early short stories. In fact, critics have said “[t]he women in *Flappers and Philosophers* who reject males and marriage… are among [its] most memorable characters” (Petry 29). In the collection’s “The Ice Palace,” Southern belle Sally Carrol Happer believes she will find matrimonial and womanly fulfillment through her engagement to wealthy northerner Harry Bellamy. Throughout her life she dreams of leaving her small Georgian town to see the world. When Sally goes north and stays with Harry’s family, she realizes that the cold climate, the isolating and chilly personalities inhabiting the Bellamy house, and the prospect of idle domestic relaxation will not satisfy her. She struggles throughout the story to articulate feelings that Friedan would later characterize as “the problem that has no name” and ultimately flees suffocation and marriage to return to the airy, warm, unfettered expanse of her small hometown (47, 73). Likewise, in Fitzgerald’s
story “The Cut-Glass Bowl,” housewife Evylyn Piper has nothing with which to occupy herself other than domestic responsibilities, an exceptionally humdrum husband, and nosy tea- and lunch-time chatter with other housewives (106-107). Driven to find some meaning or excitement, she briefly has an affair with another man (109).

Another crucial component by which Fitzgerald exposes himself as an unwitting proto-second-waver presents itself through the study of feminist ethics. By feminist ethics, I refer to the feminist response to traditional theories of ethics and decision-making processes, as defined by Carol Gilligan. In her landmark book *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan argues that the classic male-based theories of psychology cannot apply to all people, asserting that many women make decisions predicated upon more relationship-based approaches. The book reveals that traditional means of judging a decision as correct or incorrect, as essentially masculine or feminine, are incompatible with the way many people think. Gilligan ascribes the relational approach to females in light of gender formation at birth:

> For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation. (8)

Thus, women can feel a holistic connection with the others in their world having found themselves on the
same team, so to speak, as their mother-figures upon birth, allowing them to take a less legalistic, more caring approach to solving problems. Men, however, see themselves as different from their mothers and therefore develop a discontinuous understanding of the world which upholds an individual’s rights.

Third-wave and some second-wave feminists alike have disagreed with Gilligan’s assertions. Cressida Heyes acknowledges that third-wave members feel “that Gilligan reifies and draws overly general conclusions about women from the experiences of only a small group” (143). Many feminists feel she imposes her “ethic of care” upon women, using “broad general categories” which “are inclined to erase historically, culturally, and politically salient differences” among women and men alike across different societies (Heyes 146-147). Feminists from both waves have questioned Gilligan’s empirical methods, claiming that among the relatively small pool of subjects interviewed and studied, a noteworthy disparity still emerged in the data collected from members of the same gender. Third-wave feminists have also had particular complaints with the middle-class, Caucasian demographic of Gilligan’s aforementioned research subjects. Some second-wavers distance themselves from Gilligan’s work because her relationship-based descriptions of women’s psychology sound similar to the domestic familial role Friedan rails so loudly against (210). In light of such hostility within the feminist camp itself, one might question the wisdom of examining Fitzgerald’s underlying prototypical feminist
sensibilities through Gilligan’s lens.

Though Gilligan’s work may not sound like feminism, it belongs to the second-wave camp, with valid work contributing to the movement’s aims. Heyes lumps Gilligan’s work with the “second-wave’… dominant feminist theories of the 1970s which brought feminist political movements into academia to challenge the literal and implicit exclusion and derogation of women” (142). Moreover, Heyes’ definition of third-wave feminism defines itself in contrast to second-wave work such as Gilligan’s. She claims that part of what keeps third-wave feminism’s viable philosophical ascendancy “premature” stems from its members’ hostility toward the “essentialist” theories Gilligan and her like-minded colleagues hold (142). Thus, examining the decision-making processes of Fitzgerald’s male and female characters in light of Gilligan’s masculine-individual and feminine-relational classifications remains important in demonstrating how he anticipates second-wave feminism.

Interestingly, Fitzgerald will often take female characters and give them “masculine” attributes in terms of traditional psychology, while his male characters he will often depict as “feminine” in nature. Perhaps without realizing it, Fitzgerald employs a deft understanding of psychology in order to purposively empower females and disenfranchise males, one which contemporary readers could correlate to Gilligan’s controversial second-wave theories on gender constructs in moral development.

For instance, Amory Blaine never even differentiates from his mother Beatrice to earn his “masculine” identity.
Christened “delicate” and “charming” by his mother, by “five [Amory] was a delightful companion for her… [for] while more or less fortunate little… boys were defying governesses… [he was] deriving a highly specialized education from his mother.” Fitzgerald describes Amory’s “tangled” hair when peering at his mother as a metaphor of their connection, with implications far deeper than the boy’s tousled head (13, 12). Though Amory would develop something in the way of his own personality as he advances through adolescence and several prep schools, Amory struggles to become anything more than a composite character comprised of his new experiences and his mother: “[b]ut the Minneapolis years were not thick enough to conceal the ‘Amory plus Beatrice’” (37). Though Fitzgerald asserts countless times afterward that St. Regis and other future schools “painfully drill Beatrice out of him,” the close reader has a hard time believing it (37). Any separation he does achieve gets swiftly negated by a quick, compulsive attachment to other females: Isabelle, Clara, Rosalind, and Eleanor (63, 130,158, 206). Interestingly, the preceding list actually fails to include those females earlier in the novel with whom Amory connectively scaffolds his identity prior to his identity-separation from Beatrice, a separation which is debatable at best. As Catherine B. Burroughs says, “[w]hen loving women, Fitzgerald’s men often assume the posture of emotional dependents” (52).

Much evidence supports Amory’s inability to stand alone as his own man. After Amory and Isabelle have met only once, her cousin Sally claims that Amory’s “‘simply
mad to see [her] again’” (64). Though the author himself admits this description as an “exaggeration,” Sally’s words reflect the truth of the connection her cousin and Amory would swiftly form (64). Soon Fitzgerald himself begins narrating the descriptions of Isabelle and Amory as one entity: “[they] were distinctly not innocent, nor were they particularly brazen” (68). The protagonist cannot last any substantial time at Princeton without latching himself to a strong female. Later in the novel, after quickly falling for a widowed mother of two, Clara Page, Amory declares his love and his desire to marry her (137). Though she sensibly refuses, their dialogue reveals that in the short time they knew each other, Amory had already begun feeling that “any latent greatness” he had possessed was linked with her (137). Moreover, he admits to her that he has not a “bit of will,” that he is “a slave to [his] emotions, to [his] likes, to [his] hatred of boredom, [and] to most of [his] desires” (135). Amory himself realizes his own lack of a self-sufficient, self-sustaining identity when alone. Of Amory and Eleanor late in the novel, Fitzgerald writes that the protagonist “had loved himself in [her], so now what he hated was only a mirror” (222). Amory does not perceive Eleanor as a person separate from himself but as a temporary extension of his self.

Opponents to my stance might argue that Fitzgerald finally grants Amory a masculine identity at the novel’s close. Readers might think Amory’s lonely final epiphany, “I know myself… but that is all,” represents his belated separation and differentiation from the female other from which he perpetually derives his relational identity (260).
Fitzgerald drew inspiration from writers in his modernist cohort such as James Joyce, specifically drawing inspiration from the latter’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in composing *This Side of Paradise* (Tanner 1). Amory even cites *Portrait* as a novel which leaves him “puzzled and depressed” while convalescing over Rosalind (195). One might argue Amory’s epiphany parallels that of Joyce’s protagonist Stephen Dedalus. When Stephen finds himself on the brink of a life in the priesthood, he suddenly realizes that “[h]is destiny was to be elusive of the social or religious orders… destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others” and crosses the bridge from clergy to poet, writer, and priest of no one but himself (Joyce 162). Here Stephen separates from all those he is psychologically connected with and propels forward in prototypical modernist fashion. Fitzgerald attempts to mimic this transformation with Amory by insufficiently naming *Paradise*’s final chapter “The Egotist Becomes a Personage.” However, Amory has no creative path down which he can trod at the novel’s finale; though “free from all hysteria” and finding “all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken,” no action is left within his power but to “sleep deep through many nights” (260). Fitzgerald nullifies any impotent masculinity Amory gains from his denouncement of the world by following his great speech with the whimper, “But- oh, Rosalind! Rosalind!... [i]t’s all a poor substitute at best” (260). In terms of Gilligan’s gender constructs, Fitzgerald’s picaresque boyhood hero embodies the feminine. The author would continue this trend later in *The Great Gatsby*; critic Frances
Kerr reiterates H.L. Mencken’s sentiments regarding Fitzgerald by asserting that Gatsby “is a man who seems like a woman,” whose “manhood is negated” (409, 421).

In contrast, once readers see past her fur-wearing exterior, Amory’s college flame Isabelle leans not toward the feminine. Fitzgerald writes that Isabelle feels “on equal terms” with Amory, strong-willed and “quite capable of staging her own romances” (64). Of her empowering allure, Fitzgerald writes that “her sophistication had been absorbed from the boys who dangled on her favor… [and that] her capacity for love affairs was limited only by the number of the [sic] susceptible within telephone distance” (65). Milton Stern attributes such personality “absorption” to her “irresponsible selfishness” (75). Instead of attaching herself onto others in a symbiotic or identity-deriving attachment, she harvests what she can from others for herself. It comes as hardly a surprise when their relationship ends, with their interplay serving as a foreshadowing of the characters and circumstances Amory will encounter later.

Deeper into the novel, Fitzgerald confers upon Rosalind Connage so many “masculine” attributes, that by Gilligan’s generalized gender categories, she might as well be a man. Rosalind’s character gets “what she wants when she wants it and is prone to make everyone miserable when she doesn’t get it,” whose “philosophy is carpe diem for herself and laissez-faire for others,” feeling in herself “incipient meanness, conceit, cowardice, and petty dishonesty” (160-161). Rosalind appears from birth inherently differentiated from her mother and the people in her immediate
developmental environment: “[t]here are long periods when she cordially loathes her whole family.” Rosalind seems utterly indifferent to anyone’s attempt at forming an identity with her, never mind making one herself: “[s]he wants people to like her, but if they do not it never worries or changes her” (161). Despite having feelings for Amory and entertaining the connection he forms with her, she quickly severs it in order to accept the rich Dawson Ryder’s proposal. She recognizes that in contrast to Amory, Dawson is “a strong one” and a real man, her match in selfish detachment. Rosalind admits that to marry Amory would make her a “failure, and [she] never fail[s]” (181). Gilligan discusses the fear of failure associated with masculinity and the fear of success associated with femininity due to the strain competition puts on relationships; once again Rosalind establishes herself as an embodiment of manhood (Gilligan 14-15). Second-wave feminists might disagree that her marriage demonstrates any progress toward their aims, namely, freedom from domesticity, but Rosalind’s marriage does not constitute entrapment and isolation in the house. In her social and economic context, the marriage allows her to continue being “a little girl” (ironically), “dread[ing] responsibility,” and not “want[ing] to think about pots and kitchens and brooms” (183). Surprisingly, her marriage with Dawson affords her more freedom, and she consciously makes her decision for her own benefit in this regard, no matter who gets hurt.

Isabelle’s characterization stands antithetical to that of the subservient Victorian woman or the domestically
enchained mid-twentieth-century housewife. Rosalind’s decision transcends the mere political equality women receive with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment; their decision-making process allows them to stand toe-to-toe with men in the social or personal sphere. Fitzgerald grants her this equity by the ironic see-sawing of male and female characters’ attributes. By reining in men and empowering women, he provides females with a chance to create better lives for themselves while curtailing men’s historically broader options. This trend ensconced in the early Fitzgerald also manifests itself in his first stories collected in *Flappers and Philosophers*.

In “Head and Shoulders,” young Ivy League prodigy Horace Tarbox meets and marries uneducated actress Marcia Meadow, leaving academia to support a family in New York. To survive, Horace performs a trapeze act whilst Marcia pens a novel. In an irony of role reversals, Marcia’s published novel earns her the public’s distinction as cultured, while Horace is deemed the unthinking breadwinner. At the story’s conclusion, Horace cannot believe how things turned out: his wife has achieved Friedan-evocative extra-domestic public standing, while he finds himself the less career-oriented, Gilligan-reminiscent sustainer of family relationships (105). As the story’s title suggests, Horace, who once proudly resided as “Head,” becomes relegated to the lowly position of “Shoulders,” while his wife occupies his former eminence.

“Bernice Bobs Her Hair” features female characters adopting male characteristics in order to assert their rights.
In this famous story, Fitzgerald presents Marjorie as dominating and man-eating, acting especially cruel toward her visiting cousin Bernice. In fact, Bernice explicitly brands Marjorie “hard and selfish” with “hardly a feminine quality” in her (146). Bernice represents the traditional female naively headed toward the orthodox domestic life for which she has been conditioned by American culture.

Marjorie claims:

You little nut! Girls like you are responsible for all the tiresome colorless marriages; all those ghastly inefficiencies that pass as feminine qualities. What a blow it must be when a man with imagination marries the beautiful bundle of clothes that he’s been building ideals around, and finds that she’s just a weak, whining, cowardly mass of affectations! (146)

Marjorie feels little affection or connection with Bernice despite their blood relation, feeling her cousin needs correction. Marjorie tricks and coerces Bernice into bobbing her hair, a scandalous hairstyle for conservative girls at the time (159-160). When Marjorie’s lesson finally sinks into Bernice, the latter asserts herself and cuts Marjorie’s hair while sleeping (165). In this way, Bernice places herself on equal footing with her hyper-masculine cousin.

Critics have suggested Fitzgerald wholeheartedly supports his character Marjorie in her efforts to fight for the evolution of womanhood. Berman reminds readers that “[r]elics of Victorianism are often described by Fitzgerald as mindless, negligible, or senile” (33). Considering Fitzgerald’s nostalgic, romantic sensibilities, such as his
affinity for poet Rupert Brooke, one cannot simply reduce his approach to Marjorie as belonging to an overarching out-with-the-old-in-with-the-new philosophy (West 5). Fitzgerald’s striving for gender equality would continue in his later work. Consider, for example, Froehlich’s analysis of Jordan Baker’s overtly masculine character in *The Great Gatsby*.

Some readers may still remain unconvinced of Fitzgerald’s proto-second-wave feminism or even the first-wave feminism through which he lived, citing instances of hyper-masculinity in his male characters. Some may point to examples where Fitzgerald’s characters wish to become more masculine or assert their masculinity over others. Certainly, readers can find examples of hyper-masculinity in the stories “Dalyrimple Goes Wrong” and “The Four Fists” from *Flappers and Philosophers*. In the former, hero of the Great War Henry Dalyrimple returns home only to unemployment. Disgruntled, taking work far below what he feels he deserves, Dalyrimple turns to a life of theft, stealing by moonlight from the houses of the rich (188-189, 192, 199). His life of crime instills in him a newfound assertiveness, which makes him more aggressive in his day job and earns him prominence in the community and the promise of a political career (which, in turn, prompts his exit from after-hours thievery) (204, 206, 209-210). Dalyrimple appears cold and indifferent to his connections to the community, and yet he gets rewarded for it. Likewise, successful businessman Samuel Meredith of “The Four Fists” involves himself in four different fights throughout his
life, each one prompted by his pursuit of a selfish aim, such as ascendancy over peers or an affair with a married woman, each one granting him experience for future endeavors (214, 217, 223). Though Meredith excessively flaunts his masculinity, he gets rewarded for it as Dalyimple does.

One example of hyper-masculinity present in Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* manifests itself in the character’s football aspirations. In order to become “one of the gods of [his] class” at Princeton, he joins the football team (47). While such may not seem an excessive act of masculinity, the contrived circumstances surrounding Amory’s football experience suggest a thinly-veiled attempt on the author’s part to artificially inflate his protagonist’s masculinity. Conveniently, Amory finds himself “playing quarterback” by his “second week” at school, performing well enough to be “paragraphed in the corners of the ‘Princetonian’” newspaper. His football experience gets halted not by any poor performance on the field or exceptionally demeaning defeat which would compromise his masculine image of strength but instead by a knee injury that “put[s] him out for the rest of the season” (48). Cruel fate sidelines his athletic career, not unmanliness.

Others may still have hesitancy with regard to imposing proto-second-wave feminist interpretations on the self-seeking behavior of Rosalind or the cold, unfeeling demeanor of Marjorie. When people study Fitzgerald, however, they must take into account the glaring insecurities he harbored and how such feelings contributed to his overcompensating for the perceived lack of his characters’
total masculinity by caricaturing them. In particular, Michael Nowlin suggests Fitzgerald had deep insecurities concerning his masculinity which especially emerged in his attempt to reconcile his “vocation and identity” (59). His need for money would necessitate exorbitant short story writing, and yet the short story market to which he found himself chained was predominantly feminine (64). Writing in the modernist era, such a reality felt to him an artistic compromise, prompting guilt and shame over his slim creations (59, 66, 74). Given the climate in which he wrote, some critics have even referred to some of his stories’ Southern settings as “feminine,” evidencing how easily a writer could betray the modernist cause (Forter 306). A part of Fitzgerald coveted the overly masculine persona of writers like Hemingway, and such components of his psychology must be taken into account before dismissing his proto-second-wave virtues.

Fitzgerald’s overcompensation also presents itself in his insistence that his characters see combat in World War I, despite having personalities largely incompatible with hardened veterans. James H. Meredith supports this observation: “[t]hroughout his adult life, Fitzgerald deeply regretted that he never clashed in combat among ‘ignorant armies’ because like the majority of unwitting young men of his generation, he believed that war was a necessary test of manhood” (163). Dalyrimple from the story cited earlier and Amory Blaine from This Side of Paradise stand out as examples. Critics have cited the difficulty they have had believing that Amory saw combat (West 55-56). Fitzgerald
also possessed a life-long insecurity concerning his economic status. As a boy, he would tell the apocryphal and imaginative tale of how a royal family left him as an infant upon his parents’ doorstep (Long 9). Fitzgerald knew he was always just a boy from the middle class. Evidence suggests Fitzgerald felt insecure in his creative self when compared to his wife Zelda. Consistently, he put down her writing or, toward the end of their relationship, would claim she stole his material. In reality, Fitzgerald would take small portions of her writing, such as diary entries, and include them in his books (West 58). I do not report such theft here to prompt in readers any loss of respect or confidence in the author but merely to demonstrate the degree to which Fitzgerald’s inferiority complexes and traumas affected his work. Failure to take into account such occluding factors would diminish his potential as a surprisingly anticipative feminist.

Such factors are important for scholars of Fitzgerald to reexamine periodically in light of the dynamic social contexts in which we live. As Fitzgerald’s work continues to be assigned in contemporary classrooms, one must keep in mind his potential audiences and how they view women, gender, and feminism. Some might assume that reading Fitzgerald in a feminist light has become a fruitless exercise given the conceivably “postfeminist” world we have inherited today. However, such assumptions may prove false. In her research, for example, Pamela Aronson discovered that some young woman today are uncertain about whether or not they would subscribe to feminist labels and are largely unaware of current areas of “persisting”
social and gender injustice (903). Thus, examining Fitzgerald’s books through feminist lenses remains an activity which can either supplement students’ preexisting feminist knowledge or educate those who have no such preexisting feminist background.

It is impossible to plot the future course of feminist ideologies. Projecting Fitzgerald’s relevance in the future also presents no guarantees. However, some things seem to be here to stay, namely, the varied responses men and women will have toward literature. The other day I talked with a female friend about Lost Generation writers. She remarked “It seemed so much a boys’ club.” To that, I replied, “[T]hat’s what I always liked about it.” I realized then the power our perceived gender has on our readings and the sensitivity with which we must approach this construct in order to appreciate literary texts to the fullest. The masculine interpretation which prompted my admiration for Fitzgerald serves as the force which might inhibit others from enjoying him. Moreover, a feminist-slanted interpretation, which would have originally evoked my hostility toward Fitzgerald, serves as a way others might come to love his work. We must offer due consideration to both conflicting sides of any given dichotomy; no one, man or woman, should feel excluded from Fitzgerald’s rich prose.
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In *Despair* and *Bend Sinister*, Vladimir Nabokov utilizes various literary and narrative devices to study consciousness. Symbolism, unreliable narrators, and artifice present a literary reality that invites the readers to observe how each character’s consciousness builds the world it perceives. We are also exposed to different consciousness’ imperfections through which we are encouraged to reflect on our own mental and psychological inclinations. In the end, Nabokov points to the entirely individualistic and subjective nature of truth and suggests that we might never objectively know
Truth or Reality because everything we know and perceive is filtered through a biased mind. Instead, he stresses the importance of being aware of the necessarily unique way everyone perceives the world.

In *Despair*, mirrors symbolize the distorted way consciousness often perceives and interprets the world. “For Nabokov,” Ellen Pifer comments, “the world is not an objective entity but a universe embraced by consciousness” (127). In other words, reality does not exist apart from the mind that encounters it, and Nabokov compares consciousness to a mirror because the world we perceive is reflective of our inner world just as a mirror merely reflects what is before it. A distorted consciousness, like a colored mirror, produces a misrepresented version of reality that is colored by certain beliefs, emotions, and prejudices. Mirrors also don’t change shape unless shattered; comparing our mind to a mirror thus attests to our consciousness’ stubbornness as well.

Within the novel, Hermann’s consciousness is colored by his unwavering belief that he has found his doppelgänger, and this causes Hermann to see the world entirely differently from everyone else. It is interesting to note that he dislikes mirrors. “Now that is a word I loathe, that ghastly thing!” exclaims Hermann, and he even writes that “the merely mention of it has just given [him] a nasty shock” (*Despair* 27). Instead of seeing himself and the world as it really is, he relies on his own mind which repeatedly produces false doubles. Colored by his belief in a doppelgänger, Hermann imagines Felix to be his mirror image when really it is only
his consciousness reflecting distorted images: “for some ten seconds we kept looking into each other’s eyes. Slowly I raised my right arm, but his left did not rise, as I had almost expected to do. I closed my left eye, but both his eyes remained open” (*Despair* 20). When he does encounter a true mirror, Hermann convinces himself that the reflection he sees is not himself, but Felix: “when at last I got back to my hotel room, I found there, amid mercurial shadows and framed in frizzly bronze, Felix awaiting me. Pale-faced and solemn he drew near. He was now well-shaven” (*Despair* 22).

Hermann’s repeated denial of Felix’s uniqueness dramatizes the subjective nature of reality in *Despair*. We see that Hermann had been aware of their physical differences from the beginning:

I possess large yellowish teeth; his are whiter and set more closely together, but is that really important? On my forehead a vein stands out like a capital M imperfectly drawn, but when I sleep my brow is as smooth as that of my double. And those ears… the convolutions of his are but very slightly altered in comparison with mine: here more compressed, there smoothed out. We have eyes of the same shape, narrowly slit with sparse lashes, but his iris is paler than mine. (*Despair* 24)

Though he himself observes certain facial differences, Hermann insists that they are the same person. Again and again he considers the possibility that Felix might not be his double—“who knows, maybe he was not the least
like me after all” — but Hermann always returns to his original disposition (Despair 88). His ability to perceive Felix as his double while contrary evidence abound shows that “every item perceived by Nabokov’s narrators and protagonists similarly acts as a mirror of the observation of consciousness” (Pifer 127). In other words, what Hermann sees and fails to see are not indicative of what his sensory abilities are capable of, but what his consciousness is desirous of. This is why Hermann’s use of the phrase “to my eyes” is so important because it was his desire to see a doppelgänger that his eyes responded to (Despair 21).

Hermann believing Felix to be his identical twin is not an isolated, one-time mistake because we see that his consciousness idealizes doubles and produces them over and over again. When travelling through a foreign town to meet Felix again, Hermann comes across what he takes to be one of Ardalion’s pictures and asks the store owner how she came to attain it. When she replies that her niece painted it, Hermann thinks “[W]ell, I’m damned! For had I not seen something very similar, if not identical, among Ardalion’s pictures?” (Despair 65) However, Hermann later discovers that the painting’s subjects are “not quite two roses and not quite a pipe, but a couple of large peaches and a glass ashtray” (Despair 93). Similarly, Hermann is prone to thinking that every face looks, more or less, the same. When Ardalion asserts that “every face is unique,” Hermann retorts “Well, now, really—unique! … Isn’t that going too far? Take for instance the definite types of human faces that exist in the world; say, zoological types. There are
people with the features of apes; there is also the rat type, the swine type. Then take the resemblance to celebrities…” (Despair 43). Instead of perceiving individual differences in people, Hermann is busy categorizing. When he shares that he “longed passionately for [Ardalion] to start talking about doubles,” we observe that mirror image is a deep-rooted obsession with Hermann—a tint to his mirror of consciousness (Despair 43).

In addition to mirror symbolisms, Nabokov also employs an unreliable narrator to further suggest that consciousness is often misleading. In the introduction of Despair, Nabokov calls Hermann, our lying and exaggerating narrator, a “neurotic scoundrel” (Despair 11). From the very first sentence of the novel we can see Hermann’s inconsistent personality: “If I were not perfectly sure of my power to write and of my marvelous ability to express ideas with the utmost grace and vividness… So, more or less, I had thought of beginning of my tale” (Despair 13). The sentence lacks the “utmost grace” and logic that Hermann professes to possess, and the awkward phrases such as “well, as I was saying” and “I think I ought to inform the reader” insinuate that Hermann is not, in fact, perfectly sure of his literary talent (Despair 14). We also see that Hermann has no qualms about lying when he confesses, “[T]hat bit about my mother was a deliberate lie […] I could, of course have crossed it out, but I purposely leave it there as a sample of one of my essential traits: my light-hearted, inspired lying” (Despair 14). Lastly, Hermann seems to acknowledge that his writing is imperfect and unreliable because he is writing from
memory:
The pines sought gently, snow lay about, with bald patches of soil showing black. What nonsense! How could there by snow in June? Ought to be crossed out, were it not wicked to erase; for the real author is not I, but my impatient memory. Understand it just as you please; it is none of my business. (Despair 41)

It is particularly insightful for Hermann to have noticed that it is not his being itself narrating but his flawed and biased memory retracing the story. Indeed, it is our unique consciousness that stumbles upon the world to make sense of whatever it encounters. Furthermore, since all minds have different inclinations, bias and errors are to be expected.

Lastly, Nabokov uses humorous cases of extreme situational irony to convey how the folly of our consciousness can be comical at times. To the end Hermann refuses to believe that his “art,” or the foolish murder of Felix, has failed because he and Felix bear no resemblance. Instead, he complains, “[A]ll that disgusting mess is due to the inertia, pigheadedness, prejudice of humans, failing to recognize me in the corpse of my flawless double” (Despair 162). Of course, this is extremely ironic because it was precisely this stubborn bias of his mind that led him to his demise. Similarly, when first encountering Felix, Hermann comments that it would only be “the partiality and fallaciousness of human eyesight” that would lead others to miss their resemblance (Despair 19). Through these comically ironic situations, Nabokov comments on the
inherent difficulty consciousness faces in becoming aware of its own limitations.

If mirrors in Despair express consciousness’ tendency to project whatever is already within itself, liquids in Bend Sinister reflect consciousness’ fluid nature. The motif of liquid blots reoccurs throughout the novel. The very first scene in the book contains an oblong puddle, and the subsequent chapter takes place over a bridge where Krug feels “an intimate connection with the black lacquered water lapping and heaving under the stone arches of the bridge” (Bend Sinister 14). Here, the black “heaving” water seems to reflect Krug’s own self, a gloomy man who had been crying and struggling. The liquid imagery returns again when Dr. Alexander’s pen bleeds ink and Krug sees the ink blot, “a fancy footprint or the spatulate outline of a puddle” (Bend Sinister 50). Lastly, Skotoma, the founder of Ekwilism, makes explicit the comparison between human consciousness, liquid, and container:

Human beings, he said, were so many vessels containing unequal portions of this essentially uniform consciousness. It was, however, quite possible, he maintained, to regulate the capacity of the human vessels […] either by grading the contents or by eliminating the fancy vessels and adopting a standard size. (Bend Sinister 68)

Because he believed consciousness to be fluid and malleable, Skotoma strove to regulate the shape of consciousness by limiting the “vessels”—people’s beliefs, emotions, and expressions.
In Krug’s case, everything he experiences is molded according to his prevailing grief, just as everything Hermann sees is colored by his belief in a doppelgänger. Krug asserts in the beginning that “the operation has not been successful and [that his] wife will die” (*Bend Sinister* 6). The despair resulting from this tragic occasion proceeds to affect everything Krug observes. For instance, illusions of Olga flash across Krug’s mind while he is crossing the bridge: “Suddenly, with the vividness of a praedormital image or of a bright-robed lady on stained glass, she drifted across his retina, in profile, carrying something[...] and the wall dissolved, the torrent was loosed again” (*Bend Sinister* 13). The ink blot Krug observes from Dr. Alexander’s pen takes the shape of a puddle, the first thing Krug observed when looking outside the hospital window after Olga’s death. Similarly, when Paduk spills milk by knocking down the tumbler, “what was left of the milk made a kidney-shaped white puddle on the desk” (*Bend Sinister* 132). Kidney failure, of course, was the cause of Olga’s death, and the puddle image returns again and again. “The world Krug perceives,” Pifer explains, “is a psychic landscape, centered about his own preoccupations and concerns [...] Everything Krug perceives is transmuted and infused by the grief, the love, the loss he experiences at Olga’s death” (81). Thus in *Bend Sinister*, the ever-conforming liquid motif reveals the workings of Krug’s consciousness—his affected mind whose perception of the world is conditioned by his despair. Furthermore, by suggesting that it was Krug’s mental state that brought about his own demise, Nabokov
points to the danger of not being aware of the way one’s consciousness interprets the world. As an academic, Krug is always trying to reason the world out, and he fails to understand the brutality of the Ekwilist regime simply because he does not perceive its legitimacy. “My dear friend, you know well my esteem for you,” President Azureus pleads, “but you are a dreamer, a thinker. You do not realize the circumstances” (Bend Sinister 47). Instead of considering the dangers of Paduk’s regime, Krug holds onto his stubborn belief that he is somehow untouchable. His obliviousness is a partial result of his childhood memory of bullying Paduk. Krug recalls that “toad was [Paduk’s] nickname,” confessing that he was “something of a bully” who used to “trip [Paduk] up and sit upon his face” (Bend Sinister 46). Krug’s heavy reliance on the past manifests itself through his unwillingness to pay the proper respect to Paduk during his interview. Alarmed by Krug’s condescending manner, the surrounding guards warn that “this is still not the right manner” and that he “should bear in mind that notwithstanding the narrow and fragile bridge of school memories uniting the two sides, these are separated in depth by an abyss of power and dignity which even a great philosopher cannot hope to measure” (Bend Sinister 129). Though he is ordered not to “indulge in this atrocious familiarity,” Krug continues to anger Paduk and the guards (Bend Sinister 129).

Krug’s pride, philosophic tendencies, and apathy make it difficult for Krug to protect himself and David from Paduk’s totalitarian government. Indeed, Krug is unable
to foresee David’s impending danger despite the obvious hints. Entrenched in his own perception of reality, Krug entirely disregards others’ reality—Paduk’s and President Azerues’, among others—and brings about his own tragic end. Laurie Clancy aptly observes that “although [Nabokov’s] sympathies are patently with Krug, the author is nevertheless careful to point out the flaws in Krug’s greatness—his arrogance and foolish conviction of his own safety and failure to see how his presence endangers his friends” (96). For instance, though Krug has had the chance to escape the country, he delays for no apparent reason. By blinding Krug to the well-apparent fact that Mariette is a spy, Nabokov exposes how illogical our minds can be when we are insistent upon our own reality. The able reader is quick to pick up on Marietta’s suspicious motives given that she had worked for a well-known artist until he suddenly was sent to a prison camp, not to mention that she randomly shows up at Krug’s door. Even Krug’s intuition seems to respond to these hints when he comments that “there was something rather irritating about her,” but he fails to act upon it (Bend Sinister 123). Thus Nabokov suggests that it is not enough merely to know that our consciousness is biased; one should at least have a faint idea of one’s own inclinations if one wishes to avoid Hermann and Krug’s fate.

Nabokov also dramatizes the unreliable and artificial nature of reality in Bend Sinister by robbing his characters of autonomy; the use of artifice reminds the reader that there is no objective reality. The narrator repeatedly makes his presence felt by calling Krug his “favorite character” and
by employing changes in narrative voices (135). The reality in *Bend Sinister* is full of shifting perspectives. Whereas the first chapter begins with Krug’s first-person narrative, the second chapter switches to an omniscient third person narrator that observes Krug. The change in gaze, voice, and awareness between “my wife will die” and “Krug halted in the doorway” conveys that there are always at least two different angles to any given reality (*Bend Sinister* 7). The shifting identity of narrative voices makes it difficult for the reader to clearly distinguish between what is real and what is imagined in the novel (Clancy 95). The narrator also provides the reader with multiple versions of the story; after describing Krug’s meeting with Paduk, the narrator interrupts, “[N]o, it did not go on quite like that. In the first place Paduk was silent during most of the interview” (*Bend Sinister* 131). Nabokov even addresses Krug directly towards the end of the novel when he writes: “the echoing steps retreated. Silence. Now, at last, you may think” (202). By repeatedly disrupting the seemingly real world of *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov suggests that the world we live in, like Krug’s world, is entirely dependent on human consciousness.

The biggest authorial intervention occurs at the end of the novel when Krug finds that he is a mere character at the whim of the narrator, and it is important for us to note that our position is not too different from Krug’s; we, too, are at the whims of the universe and our own consciousness and will therefore never truly and objectively understand reality. Towards the end of *Bend Sinister*, the narrator shares that he “felt a pang of pity for Adam and slid towards him
along an inclined beam of pale light—causing instantaneous madness” (203). This madness opens Krug’s eyes to the “simple reality” that “he and his son and wife and everybody else are merely [Nabokov]’s whims,” that everything is “only absurd mirages, illusions oppressive to Krug during his brief spell of being” (Bend Sinister vii). Aware of the true nature of his existence, Krug cries, “[Y]ou silly people […] what on earth are you afraid of? What does it all matter? Ridiculous! Same as those infantile pleasures—Olga and the boy taking part in some silly theatricals, she getting drowned, he losing his life or something in a railway accident. What on earth does it matter?” (Bend Sinister 206) The narrator even saves Krug from dying by suddenly putting an end to the novel, an artifice Nabokov describes as “slippery sophism, a play upon words” (210). However, Nabokov does not employ these extreme interventions solely to exercise his omnipotent power as the creator or even to take the easy way out. Instead, by using artifice to create a dream-like world where illusion and reality overlap, Nabokov invites the reader to compare his reality to that of Krug’s:

The origins of our existence are ultimately mysterious, remaining beyond the reach of the words we summon to define and describe. Hedged by the unknown surrounding us, we struggle, like Adam Krug, to peer beyond the limits of our condition, seeking to populate the terrifyingly empty spaces with our words and images. (Pifer 95)

By witnessing Krug’s lack of autonomy, we become aware of the possibility that our reality, too, is never
concrete, independent, and objective.

In the end, symbolism, unreliable narrators, and artifce in _Despair_ and _Bend Sinister_ show that life is a series of biased impressions and that every consciousness is necessarily singular. Each consciousness builds the individual’s world, and this is why the unique nature of consciousness is crucial; there is no such thing as average reality because our subjective minds render it impossible for us to grasp the objective truth—if there is any at all. Both novels uphold the supremacy of the individual consciousness, no matter how imperfect it may be. Lastly, because each individual consciousness is unique, to ignore or suppress someone’s consciousness is to wipe out his or her world and existence. Nabokov seems to speak directly through Ardalion in _Despair_: “in the whole world there are not, and cannot be, two men alike, however well you disguise them” (_Despair_ 170). Nabokov defends every consciousness’ singularity, and it is only the deranged or the evil—such as Hermann and Paduk—who believe in true doubles.
Works Cited


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