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## The Oswald Review of Undergraduate Research and Criticism In the Discipline of English: Volume 18 Fall 2016

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*In the Discipline of English*

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# THE *Oswald Review*

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## CONTENTS

GENDER AND POWER IN <i>WAITING FOR GODOT</i> .....	7
--	---

Ryan Wright  
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THE READER'S COMPLICITY: UNIVERSALITY IN <i>WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS</i> , <i>THE LARAMIE PROJECT</i> , AND <i>THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER</i> .....	29
--	----

Aubrey Kosa  
Christopher Newport University

BLIND WITH SUPERSTITION, CURSED WITH ILLUSIONS: MASCULINITY AND WAR IN BIERCE'S "CHICKAMAUGA" .....	47
--	----

Salina Patterson  
Middle Georgia State University

JAMES JOYCE'S <i>GNOMON</i> OF PAIN IN "GRACE" AND "THE DEAD" .....	58
---	----

Bari K. Boyd  
Mount St. Mary's University

THE GAME DEBATE: VIDEO GAMES AS INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING .....	69
---	----

Melissa Somerdin  
University of Missouri, St. Louis





Ryan Wright  
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Gender and Power in *Waiting for Godot*

In April of 1988, a Dutch theater company named De Haarlemse Toneelschuur began a production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. News spread around the city of Haarlem's theater culture of the company's decision to cast all five of the play's male characters with female actors. Beckett notoriously sued the Haarlem theater group for this decision, claiming that the company failed to disclose their intended cast to him when they requested production license. The trial was legally justified by Beckett's controversial and enigmatic position that the casting decision violated his play's artistic intent (Bordewijk 151). Beckett enforced strict directorial rules on all productions of *Godot*. Dutch theater critic Cobi Bordewijk humorously recounts in her article "The Integrity of the Playtext: Disputed Performances of *Waiting for Godot*" that Beckett spoke out against the 1955 Dublin production's choice of costume color, Peter Hall's London production for its shorter length of dialogue pauses, and "the replacement of the stone by a heap of twigs in the Berlin production, because in this way the simultaneous presence of the animal, the mineral and the vegetable was disturbed" (145).

In spite of the playwright's precise instructions, the Haarlem court judge ruled to allow the female cast performance, citing previous court rulings allowing mixed-race casting. Beckett's biographer and close friend James Knowlson writes that the judge's opinion was that, "since the play was about the human condition in general...it could be played by either men or women" (610). Beckett failed to keep this production from opening, but Knowlson recounts that Beckett's frustration over the Haarlem production caused him to call for a ban on all further productions of his plays in the Netherlands (610). Beckett vehemently insisted both during and after the trial that he did not believe women ought to perform in any role the play offered. When asked about the Haarlem controversy in an interview with theater scholar Linda Ben-Zvi, Beckett defended his position about the casting requirements by insisting "Women don't have prostates"—likely referring to the textual implication that Vladimir's

prostate is enlarged because he frequently needs to urinate (x). Beckett's specificity surrounding *Godot's* staging has induced as much uncertainty among scholars as it has frustration among theater companies. The particular vehemence with which Beckett took on the De Haarlemse Toneelschuur Company has become a significant event in the larger feminist debate addressing gender inequality in the western high arts. The controversy intersects with political-philosophical questions of gender performativity, of authorial intent and its significance, and raises pertinent questions for how to understand the role of gender in the play.

The relationship between gender and power in Beckett's works is a heavily-covered topic in feminist scholarship, and so I draw from several feminist Beckett scholars to posit a textual reading of how masculinity and power interrelate in *Waiting for Godot*. These feminist views of gender and power are employed in conjunction with R. W. Connell's thorough delineation of the various categories of masculinity because I contend that each character, at one time or another, takes on different gradations of masculinity—identities that fluctuate depending on how each character is situated in the schema of power between themselves and the other male characters. As much feminist Beckett scholarship is influenced by the work of Jacques Lacan, my model for gender power dynamics comes from Lacan's phallogocentric model of gender identity constitution. Though Lacan's model is a somewhat outdated model of power that produces only two, polar positions on the gender spectrum, it nonetheless serves as a useful tool for analyzing power dynamics in *Waiting for Godot* because of how the play presents its characters in doubled pairs (Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, and Godot and the boy).

This inquiry does not intend to provide any defense of Beckett's exclusive casting preferences. Its intent is merely to examine how gender operates in a work that is most commonly considered, by casual theatergoers and academics alike, to be a non-gendered, existential meditation on the human condition in general. Though this inquiry's inspiration does stem from the Haarlem casting controversy, it does not presuppose that there need be any direct or corollary connection between the gender of an actor and the gender of a character they play. For my purposes here, the casting controversy is primarily useful because it suggests that *Waiting for Godot* is capable of being interpreted as having an implicit relationship to masculine gender presentations. What follows is an exploration into what that

relationship might be.

The three pairs of character relationships most informed by power dynamics in the play are Godot and the Boy (or the Boy and the tramps, as shall be argued), Pozzo and Lucky, and Vladimir and Estragon. Examining each relationship's power structure with the Lacanian model enables a new understanding of the disempowerment each character suffers. I argue here that much of *Waiting for Godot's* thematic anxiety and existential dread stem from its characters' inability to maintain stable power positions vis-à-vis the other characters. As Lacan, and many other feminist scholars since, discuss how gender differences are always constituted by—and are even synonymous with—tensions of power between differently gendered bodies, I hold that the play in part reflects an anxiety about the instability of each character's gender identity because of their instability within a complex set of power relations. Pozzo and Vladimir, specifically, experience existential dread because of their inability to rely on a stable, hegemonic masculinity. Whether rendered inferior to the titular patriarch Godot, or because each character is unable to maintain a dominant power-position, masculinity throughout this play is made atrophied and impotent—and thus each character's position within a larger framework of gender and power is consistently unstable.

Before beginning such an analysis, “masculinity” requires definition. Modern gender scholars such as R.W. Connell and Jack Halberstam have observed that there is not any singular masculinity, but a plurality of masculinities that are susceptible to change depending on race, cultural-temporal zeitgeist, social class, perceived gender, and various other facets of social power positions in which the masculine person is situated. In her sociological analysis of masculine gender operations, Connell defines a “hegemonic” genre of masculinity as such:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women... It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority).

(77)

This “hegemonic masculinity”—a masculinity defined by its position as an authoritative power—is the kind of masculinity *Godot’s* characters frequently pursue in a kind of Sisyphean effort that is never permanently achieved. I am interested in examining how hegemonic masculinity manifests in each character’s behavior and speech to substantiate the claims that it is drained of its power, and that this impotence is a significant source of anxiety for several of the characters.

I adopt a Lacanian interpretation of power dynamics between *Godot’s* characters for the interpretation that follows. In “The Meaning of the Phallus,” Lacan proposes a “phallogocentric” semiotic model of power dynamics, which posits that the existence of an empowered “subject” is ultimately dependent on the existence of a disempowered ‘Other,’ or “object”:

For the phallus is a signifier... [The phallus] demand constitutes this Other as already possessing the ‘privilege’ of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of the one thing by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus sketches out the radical form of the gift of something which it does not have, namely, what is called love.  
(80)

The roles “subject” and “object” are only ever differentiated and constituted via a simultaneous creation and domination. The masculine subject/signified necessitates the loving dependence of a compliant feminine object/signifier to reflect back and confirm the masculine subject’s dominant status. Lacan considers the Freudian phallus as a signifier that facilitates this power structure in terms of desire for another being. The phallus is a signifier that substantiates subject-hood when the one who desires the love of another has that love reciprocated. When a masculine subject desires the love of a feminine object, she is said to be the “phallus” in the sense that she fulfills his desire. She, however, is not existing in this power structure autonomously, for she is circumscribed within the bounds of the male subject’s desire. Judith Butler elegantly summarizes Lacan’s analysis in *Gender Trouble*: “‘being’ the Phallus is always a ‘being for’ a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that ‘being for’” (58). However, while masculine subjects may appear to hold power over the Othered, feminized objects, the masculine subject’s status as “subject” is actually dependent on

the reciprocated desire of his love-object. By reflecting the subject's dominance back with reciprocated desire, the feminine object-made-Other is actually what creates the masculine subject's sense of dominance. The female Other is the true locus of power in Lacan's phallogocentric symbolic order. For this reason, feminist critics frequently use this model of power to interpret patriarchal power dynamics in order to deconstruct and undermine them.

Using Lacan's phallogocentric theory to examine how masculinity operates in *Waiting for Godot* enables an interpretation that examines specifically how the play's characters experience disempowerment, even as they strive to resist disempowerment by attempting, and failing, to enact hegemonic masculinity. While this method of interpretation has been used in many analyses of Beckett's female characters, it has not been used to interpret the various gradations of power and masculinity amongst the men of *Waiting for Godot*.

For instance, feminist theater critic Anna McMullan argues that Beckett constructs essentially disempowered female characters that bring the "underside[s] of power and authority" to the foreground of his dramas. By doing so, she argues, Beckett plays with the subject/object dichotomy that presupposes the phallogocentric symbolic order without attempting to destabilize or question its patriarchal underpinnings:

[Beckett's] concern with fragmentation, loss and *manque-à-être* suggests an irreparable lack of being which is always at odds with the structures of representation. These structures seem to be ordained by omnipotent patriarchal figures who condemn their creatures to impossible attempts to 'realize identity.' The figures of power and authority in Beckett's plays are almost exclusively male—Godot, Pozzo, Hamm, the Director... As numerous feminist theorists insist, issues of power and gender cannot be separated, since the Symbolic order is constructed on the repression of the feminine as maternal body and as the Other which must be excluded for the identity and voice of the One to be asserted, resulting in an imbalance between the male and the female gender in their historical relation to authority and representation. (70)

But in a play where there are no women to take the role of Other, *Godot's* characters are incapable of realizing a hegemonic masculine identity for a reason that strikes to the heart of how Connell and Lacan each outline masculinity. In lieu of any feminine alternative, each character attempts to construct disempowered—often feminized—Others out of one another. Like an existential game of King of the Hill, each character struggles toward a hegemonic masculine position, and—in so doing—inevitably undermines the dominant identity of the characters who attempts to Other them. In other words, they attempt to constitute a masculine self via the only means they know how: using other characters who are all pursuing the same dominant status, a status only one of them may hold at a time.

Though Godot is not present in the play, he emits a hegemonic masculinity that circumscribes the other characters and prevents them from assuming that status. Feminist Beckett scholar Jennifer M. Jeffers, in a textual analysis informed by biographical premises, claims that Godot's eternally deferred arrival indicates "the impossibility of a *return* of the masculine authoritative tradition" from before World War II (96-97, italics in original). She contends that the characters may at times attempt to enact an ideal masculinity, but consistently fail for the very same reason that Godot cannot arrive: the postwar condition of masculinity has rendered it disempowered and inaccessible to modern men. The scope of Jeffers' argument focuses on Beckett's membership in a generation of Anglo-Irish men who had "no way to *recover* masculine privilege and generations of hegemonic dominance in Ireland" (97, italics in original). For my textual reading of masculinity in the play, it is important to consider Godot as Jeffers considers him: a purely distilled promise of an authoritative, patriarchal essence of power. Godot's level of hegemony affects 'lesser' masculine characters like Pozzo and Vladimir such that their masculinities may (to continue borrowing terms from Connell) be considered "subordinate masculinities": "Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell 78). Godot's hegemonic power constructs an economy of power that dominates and subordinates the male characters who appear on stage.

This hegemonic power of Godot's, paradoxically enough, is primarily the product of Godot's absence from the stage. Godot is one of Beckett's richest paradoxes in how he enforces an authoritative

presence by providing the ever-potential hope that he *may* appear. Godot enforces his authority on the tramps and audience by holding them in a forever-deferred state of anticipating his arrival. There is a striking similarity between the metaphysical means by which Godot holds characters and audience captive by waiting, and the metaphysical operations that Judith Butler suspects occur when we perceive gendered bodies. She explains how her performative gender theory first occurred to her:

I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida's reading of Kafka's "Before the Law." There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wonder whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates...the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself.

(xiv)

For Derrida, the deferral of the Law's disclosure imbues it with its power. Similarly, the deferral of Godot's arrival facilitates his authority. In line with Butler's textual analysis of "Before the Law," Godot's power and existence operate on the same metaphysical level that his masculinity does. Considering how Godot's absence from the stage functions in terms of power opens an interpretive avenue for examining how his hegemonic masculinity operates as a dominating force that disempowers the tramps within the phallogocentric model.

Examining how Godot's *potential* embodiment affects the tramps demonstrates that Godot's deferred arrival is simultaneously the same force that limits the tramps' agency while operating as the defining characteristic of Godot's simultaneous presence/absence. Early in the first act, the tramps reflect on their dependent position to Godot:

ESTRAGON: We've lost our rights?

VLADIMIR: (*distinctly*). We got rid of them.

*Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.*

ESTRAGON: (*feebly*). We're not tied? (*Pause*). We're not—

VLADIMIR: Listen!

*They listen, grotesquely rigid.*

ESTRAGON: I hear nothing.

VLADIMIR: Hsst!

*(They listen. Estragon loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of Vladimir who totters. They listen, huddled together).* Nor I.

ESTRAGON: You gave me a fright!

VLADIMIR: I thought it was he.

[...]

VLADIMIR: Tied?

ESTRAGON: Ti-ed.

VLADIMIR: How do you mean tied?

ESTRAGON: Down.

VLADIMIR: But to whom? By whom?

ESTRAGON: To your man.

VLADMIR: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it.

*(Pause)*. For the moment. (Beckett 15-17)

Estragon's use of the word "tied" effectively explains the significance Vladimir places on the potential for Godot's arrival. Just as Estragon begins to ask if they are "tied" to, or are reliant on—are subject to—Godot, Vladimir's sudden rush of hope for Godot's appearance serves as a clear, affirmative response. Following Butler's consideration of gender, the tramps' anticipation of Godot's arrival simultaneously conjures Godot and is Godot. The word "tied" does not only speak to the tramps' relationship to



Godot, but to what Godot essentially is for these characters and even for the audience: the ‘One’ who ties, the subject who makes all Others object. This same function of Godot’s power is the defining characteristic of hegemonic masculinity within the Lacanian model. Masculine hegemony constructs itself by simultaneously differentiating itself from femininity via Othering and constructing the feminine. Godot’s power is not divorced from his masculine hegemony; it *is* his masculine hegemony, and he is his power.

As such a masculine force of power, Godot withholds any sort of empowerment from the tramps, including hegemonic masculine empowerment, while simultaneously Othering them into a power position comparable to the Lacanian feminine Other. The tramps, ironically, are the Others that substantiate the power, identity, and even the existence of the patriarch Godot via their dependent waiting for him, but they are unable to act on their position within the power structure because they are unable (or unwilling) to leave without meeting him:

ESTRAGON: [...] Let’s go

VLADIMIR: We can’t.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*). Ah! (8)

The way Godot’s power operates is a necessary component of interpreting how the staged characters’ attempts at empowerment are circumscribed by Godot’s masculine power because of how it places all other masculinities in the play in subordinate roles—and makes them subordinate masculinities.

The character whose affiliation with Godot best reflects the gender disempowered position that all the other characters are put into is the Boy who appears at the end of each act. He is young, meaning he has the potential to be perceived as masculine, but is subordinate in his masculine performance to the older men who populate the stage. The very fact that language differentiates his masculinity, the French “garçon” and the English “boy,” indicates a markedly different masculinity than the kind implied in “homme” or “man.” If a hierarchical list of power dynamics among the play’s characters were made, and if each character’s influence and control over the others were ranked across the script’s

text, Godot and the Boy would bracket the list's respective beginning and end while all other characters intermittently change positions with one another over the course of the play. The Boy never leaves that bottom position. Even the more passive characters, Estragon and Lucky, at times assert masculine dominance over the Boy:

VLADIMIR: Well what is it?

ESTRAGON: What kept you so late?

*The Boy looks at them in turn, not knowing to which he should reply.*

VLADIMIR: *(to Estragon)*. Let him alone.

ESTRAGON: *(violently)*. You let me alone. *(Advancing, to the Boy.)* Do you know what time it is?

BOY: *(recoiling)*. It's not my fault, Sir.

ESTRAGON: And whose is it? Mine?

BOY: I was afraid, Sir.

ESTRAGON: Afraid of what? Of us? *(Pause.)* Answer me!

[...]

VLADIMIR: You were afraid of the whip?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: The roars?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: The two big men.

BOY: Yes Sir. (53-54)

Both "big men," including the subordinate and helpless Lucky, intimidate the necessarily subordinate child. Even Estragon suddenly takes on a position of domineering authority when speaking to the Boy, and Vladimir experiences a momentary paternal bond with him:

ESTRAGON: That's all a pack of lies. *(Shaking the Boy by the arm.)* Tell us the truth!

BOY: (*trembling*). But it is the truth, Sir!

VLADIMIR: Will you let him alone! What's the matter with you?

(*Estragon releases the boy*)

[...]

VLADIMIR: You don't know if you're unhappy or not?

BOY: No Sir.

VLADIMIR: You're as bad as myself. (54-56)

In this way the Boy is the closest thing to a consistently subordinate Other through which the other characters attempt to construct a sense of masculine subjecthood. All four of them at least implicitly use the Boy for such identity construction, even only from the audience's perspective as with Pozzo and Lucky who did not know the Boy was present. The ease with which these characters fall into the performed subject/object dichotomy of power with the Boy, however, is the counterpart to the ease with which Godot holds that power relationship with all other characters in the play.

In Lacanian terms, the Boy may be said to “be for” or “signify” the masculine subjects who use him. The tramps easily recognize the Boy as a signifier for Godot (and thus Godot's masculinity) yet not do not perceive the Boy as masculine himself. The Boy is a signifier for Godot, yet he is incapable (unlike Pozzo) of being confused for Godot:

*The Boy advances timidly, halts.*

VLADIMIR: What is it?

BOY: Mr. Godot...

VLADMIR: Obviously... (*Pause*). Approach. (53)

The Boy's position in the semiotics of gendered power are “obvious” to all who look upon him. The Boy stands in for Godot; he denotes his presence even though Godot himself remains absent. Vladimir and all other characters, however, fail to consciously recognize how their disempowered position is much closer to the Boy's than it ever could be to Godot's since, as will soon be argued, they all have moments of attempting to dominate one another to achieve a sense of Godot-esque masculine subjecthood. The Boy, as a phallogocentric signifier, is the only member of the cast fit to deliver the only bodily descriptor

of Godot in the play. The boy delivers a descriptor that signifies (like the Boy's own Object-ified presence) Godot's authoritative masculinity:

VLADIMIR: (*softly*). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY: Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR: Fair or... (*he hesitates*)...or black?

BOY: I think it's white, Sir.

*Silence.*

VLADIMIR: Christ have mercy on us! (106)

The Boy facilitates a layering of power: he is made Other by the four primary characters, who are in turn made Other by the supreme force of masculine hegemony that is Godot. Within the bounds of Godot's hegemonic masculinity, the other characters attempt to enact hegemonic masculinities, but these are necessarily subordinate to Godot because (as argued by Connell) hegemony may only be maintained by a single group holding that singular, dominant power-position.

Perhaps the character that is most affected by this hegemonic ceiling that Godot creates is the tyrannical Pozzo. As he comes on stage for the first time, Pozzo exudes a natural sense of authority that puts all other characters on stage in a subordinate position to him. His introductory stage directions delineate these power positions before he even walks on stage:

*A terrible cry, close at hand [...] Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, [the tramps] wait. Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears.* (18)

Pozzo's introduction is marked by the tramps' fear and confusion and then by Lucky's status as Pozzo's slave. In agreement with the Lacanian model, it is the slave who appears first on stage as the dominated who enables the identity of the master. Lucky must both physically and metaphysically appear on stage before Pozzo in order to substantiate (and create) Pozzo's masculine subjecthood. The rope around Lucky's neck serves as a visual drum-roll that prefaces Pozzo's entrance, and simultaneously embeds

the pair in a similar signifying relationship to the Boy's and Godot's. The Boy and Lucky each serve to denote their empowered subjects—each are seen by the tramps and audience as representative of some other, more powerful, being. Taking a similar power-position to Godot, Pozzo manages to reach toward a comparable hegemonic masculine status. Startled, Vladimir and Estragon are temporarily no longer waiting for Godot, but “they wait” for the origin of the cry. In this moment, the locus of power over the tramps briefly shifts from Godot to Pozzo. Pozzo dominates the attention of both characters and audience with the same tool he uses to dominate Lucky: the taut, even phallic, rope enables a violent domination of Lucky such that Pozzo attains the subject status of ‘signified’ in the phallogocentric model. Didi, Gogo, Lucky, and the audience are all aligned in this moment while waiting for Pozzo's entrance vis-à-vis Lucky and the attention-binding rope.

Though emulating a Godot-like authority, Pozzo's masculinity ultimately fails to maintain a consistent hegemonic status because of the matrix of power that forces all within it beneath Godot in the hierarchy. Pozzo emulates this Godot-esque authority by imperfectly attempting to metatheatrically dominate both the events of the play and the focus of the audience such that those who gaze upon him take an ‘Object’ position to substantiate Pozzo's empowerment. The phonetic harshness of his name, for instance, is used to silence any other character's speech and even evokes an exaggerated first syllable in its articulation:

ESTRAGON: (*timidly, to Pozzo*). You're not Mr. Godot,

Sir?

POZZO: (*terrifying voice*). I am Pozzo! (*Silence*). Pozzo! Does that name mean nothing to you? (*Silence*). I say does that name mean nothing to you?

*Vladimir and Estragon look at each other questioningly.*

ESTRAGON: (*pretending to search*). Bozzo... Bozzo...

VLADIMIR: (*ditto*). Pozzo... Pozzo...

POZZO: PPPOZZZO! (19)

Pozzo attempts to imbue the sound of his name with an affective power to control the tramps'

behavior, but Vladimir and Estragon unintentionally undermine this reach for power when they fail to recognize Pozzo's name. Pozzo's hegemony, here, determinately pales in comparison to Godot's. Pozzo is necessarily less impressive, important, and less powerful than Godot if the mere fact of him not being Godot is enough to devolve his authority into shouted demands. Pozzo's masculine authority—unstable in both Lacan and Connell's theories—requires that he place the onus on Others, here Vladimir and Estragon, to substantiate it. Pozzo performs important signs of autonomy when contrasted with the tramps. For instance, unlike Vladimir, for whom laughter is “prohibited,” Pozzo is able to laugh with what the stage directions describe as “*an enormous laugh*” (19, italics in original).

Nonetheless, Pozzo inevitably fails where Godot succeeds in maintaining a hegemonic masculinity because Pozzo's presence on stage falls short of the unyielding, hegemonic authority of which Godot is composed. Jeffers refers to the imperfections of Pozzo's masculinity represented in the play's language, calling him an “imposter to the throne of Godot” (19). Interpreting Godot as an emblem of prewar, Western patriarchy, Jeffers argues that Pozzo represents an imperfect double of Godot's patriarchal hegemony since he is initially mistaken for Godot by both the tramps and first-time audience members. Their flawed double relationship, she contends, foregrounds Pozzo's masculine imperfections, the most damning of which is an implied homosexuality between himself and Lucky:

Critics always avoid the sexually sadomasochistic possibilities that [Pozzo and Lucky] present.... The fact that Pozzo is authoritative, yet effeminate, is overlooked. Pozzo is the pretender to the throne of Godot—so why is it not conceivable that he is also pretender to the throne of masculine-heterosexuality? Nothing explicitly sexual occurs in the play, and yet, Pozzo forcefully controls his partner's body through bondage. Beckett may be presenting something darker and more deeply disturbing to Western masculine heterosexuality than critics wish to acknowledge. (98-99)

Pozzo's possible homosexual masculinity can only be judged as a subordinate masculinity to Godot's hegemony in the context of Western hetero-patriarchal power dynamics. Indeed, Connell even refers to contemporary Western homosexual man as “the most important case in contemporary European/

American society” of subordinate masculinity when she first defines the term (78). Jeffers’ interpretation of Pozzo’s character in this way signals that Pozzo’s masculinity fails to maintain the heteronormative, hegemonic base of patriarchal subjecthood if such a subordinate masculinity can even be sensed in his presentation.

Perhaps consistent with Jeffers’ suspicions are my observations that Pozzo defends his authority by devoting his time to keeping others in a submissive position. When asked why Lucky does not put down his bags, Pozzo’s response is prolonged and peppered with violent tugs at Lucky’s rope:

Pozzo: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? (*He looks at Lucky, jerks the rope [...] Lucky looks at him.*) Good. [...] I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready? (*He looks at them all in turn, jerks the rope.*) Hog! (*Lucky raises his head.*) I don’t like talking in a vacuum.  
Good. Let me see.

*He reflects.* (28)

Pozzo’s masculine authority demands this consistent level of maintenance. Unlike the tramps, who earn the audience’s attention passively at the play’s beginning (as there is no alternative), Pozzo *actively* acquires the audience and tramps’ attention with forced and prolonged demands for it. Pozzo forcibly drains any other presence on stage from having the potential to distract from his. In spite of this effort, Pozzo can only temporarily manage to distract from Godot’s unyielding presence/absence. Pozzo is free to do very little besides maintain his sense of authority, while Godot’s perfect masculine hegemony effortlessly subdues the tramps and audience solely with his absence and anticipated arrival.

The second act reveals the deep extent to which Pozzo as a character is defined by constantly maintaining his authority. Pozzo’s blindness is linked primarily to his fall from authoritative masculine privilege, but simultaneously expresses the instability and loss of how he defines himself in relation to power. Contrasting Pozzo’s and Lucky’s aforementioned entrance stage directions from act one with their entrance directions in act two suggests an interpretation of the rope as flaccidly phallic, indicating the fragility of Pozzo’s authority: “*Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is blind. Lucky burdened as before. Rope as before, but much shorter, so that Pozzo may follow more easily*” (Beckett 87). The rope has become

necessary for Pozzo to move at all, not the same image of dominating masculine subjecthood from the first act. Its shortness simultaneously articulates Pozzo's reliance on Lucky, "*so that Pozzo may follow more easily,*" and tethers his blindness to his loss of personal autonomy. This loss of autonomy does not merely indicate Pozzo's fall from power, but may even be considered a kind of emasculation. He falls to the level of Lucky, a character that is measurably subordinate in the masculine hierarchies outlined by Connell, and even marked as a more feminine presence in the play by the two tramps:

VLADIMIR: (*grudgingly*). He's not bad looking.

ESTRAGON: (*shrugging his shoulders, wry face*). Would you say so?

VLADIMIR: A trifle effeminate. (23)

Affiliating Pozzo with Lucky's subordinate masculinity is a significant component of what his fall from power is composed of. While in the first act Pozzo does an enormous amount of work to differentiate himself from Lucky and the tramps' power-position, the stage directions of the second act indicate that now the two are more similar in terms of power. Pozzo obstinately binds himself to hegemonic power in the first act such that his loss of it disrupts and destroys the means by which Pozzo orients himself in the world around him. While the first act's Pozzo knows the time of day by looking at his watch (allowing him an awareness of time that the tramps are consistently uncertain of), his loss of sight has left him entirely dependent on Lucky and the tramps for orienting himself temporally or spatially. Pozzo allegorizes the Lacanian model of power with how deeply his hegemony relies on a disempowered Other. Any existential dread the play might suggest about its characters' various masculinities is most pronounced in Pozzo's character because of the extent of his dramatic fall.

Though Pozzo, in my view, is the best example of this disparity of masculine power that I see the play grappling with, Vladimir and Estragon's relationship is the most frequent site of this theme in the script. Vladimir and Estragon unsuccessfully attempt to achieve hegemonic masculinity by controlling and limiting one another's sense of independence. In so doing, they consistently cause one another profound grief and anxiety. The two tramps take turns upsetting one another's attempts at achieving a dominant power position by two primary means: 1) each of them (but primarily Vladimir)



have a tendency to argue that the other is in a more effeminate position in their partnership, and suggest that the more feminine partner requires the more masculine partner as a matter of necessity; 2) each of them, in the process of attempting to use the other as such, asserts himself as more independent than the other—thus destabilizing the other’s illusions of autonomy and subjecthood. For instance, it is often unclear whether Estragon genuinely needs Vladimir for personal support and guidance, or whether Vladimir needs Estragon to need him. Vladimir repeatedly asserts that he is responsible for protecting Estragon from the strangers who beat him:

VLADIMIR: When I think of it... all these years... but for me... where would you be... (*Decisively.*) You’d be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

ESTRAGON: And what of it?

VLADIMIR (*gloomily*): It’s too much for one man.... (3)

Vladimir’s alleged responsibility for Estragon’s safety demonstrates how Vladimir attempts to construct a sense of independent authority via his responsibility for Estragon. Vladimir’s attempts to construct authority are recognizably similar in kind, yet weaker in degree, to the two more markedly patriarchal characters: Godot and Pozzo. Vladimir may prey on what he perceives to be Estragon’s dependence in order to substantiate a personal sense of masculine hegemony, but, unlike Pozzo and Godot, Vladimir is frequently willing to admit his personal feelings of need for Estragon. Vladimir repeatedly and openly expresses to Estragon that without him Vladimir is prone to experience anxiety:

VLADIMIR: ... (*Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts finally before Estragon.*) Gogo! ... Gogo! ... GOGO!

*Estragon wakes with a start.*

ESTRAGON: (*restored to the horror of his situation.*) I was asleep!

(*Despairingly.*) Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely. (10)

Vladimir’s willingness to admit his reliance on Estragon makes hegemonic masculinity inaccessible to him in these moments because hegemonic masculinity requires the illusion of autonomous authority. The moment this illusion is interrupted, the true nature of the feminine object’s power to substantiate

the masculine subject is revealed. With its visibility, the system that enables masculine empowerment fails. In contrast to Pozzo, Vladimir does not rush to defend his masculinity when his reliance on his partner is acknowledged:

POZZO. [Lucky] used to be so kind... so helpful... and entertaining... my good angel... and now... he's killing me. [...] Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. (*More and more his old self.*) I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it. (*Drawing himself up, striking his chest.*) Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer? (34)

Unlike Pozzo, Vladimir does not tether successfully achieving masculine hegemony to his deeper sense of self. When Pozzo's power is disrupted, he could be said to become an entirely different character, requiring, as the stage directions here indicate, that he become "*more and more his old self*" after he reorients himself to presenting himself as autonomous. Vladimir's character, however, appears consistent even though he oscillates along various levels of semi-empowered subordinate masculinities.

Vladimir and Estragon's wavering dependence on one another is a paradigmatic example of how power relates to gender in the play. When Vladimir begins wearing Lucky's hat after the vaudeville-esque hat exchange, Vladimir playfully takes on an aestheticized, feminized, and vaguely sexualized role by asking Estragon to comment on how he looks with a new hat:

VLADIMIR: [...] How does it fit me?  
 ESTRAGON: How would I know?  
 VLADIMIR: No, but how do I look in it?  
*He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.*  
 ESTRAGON: Hideous. (81)

Here, Vladimir intentionally invites Estragon to perform a kind of ironic male gaze, playfully allowing Estragon to take the role of masculine subject to Vladimir's feminized object. Vladimir appears to understand, here, that there is a relationship between gender and power, and that he and Estragon are

implicated in their power dynamics. Estragon, however, is recurrently ignorant of Vladimir's various attempts at gender play. When Vladimir asks Estragon to play roles that mimic Pozzo and Lucky, Estragon is unable to understand how to take on the different power roles that Vladimir mimics:

VLADIMIR: Will you not play?

ESTRAGON: Play what?

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON: Never heard of it.

VLADIMIR: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. (*He imitates Lucky sagging under the weight of his baggage. Estragon looks at him with stupefaction.*) Go on.

ESTRAGON: What am I to do?

VLADIMIR: Curse me! (82)

The tramps cyclically confuse and frustrate one another in such moments because Vladimir is aware of the power dynamics between the two that Estragon frequently fails to recognize. It may even be that such power dynamics might even not exist at all between the tramps were it not for Vladimir's insistence on repeating them and play-acting them.

When the duo play-act their routine of arguing—threatening to leave one another, making amends, and continuing to wait together—they encapsulate a summary of their relationship and the oscillating power dynamics between them:

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

*They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.*

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

[...]

ESTRAGON: Now let's make it up.

VLADIMIR: Gogo!

ESTRAGON: Didi!

VLADIMIR: Your hand!

ESTRAGON: Take it!

VLADIMIR: Come to my arms! (85)

This parody of their dynamic demonstrates how the frustrations that build between the two devolve into power struggles before reverting back to their normal placidity. Their tension recurs because they are “tied” via patriarchal hegemony to Godot, while simultaneously relying on each other for validation and calm. Vladimir struggles with an anxiety surrounding his dominant position over Estragon, and is terrified of Estragon leaving him alone. Estragon likely fails to recognize how his threat to leave Vladimir destabilizes Vladimir’s sense of authority for the very same reasons that Estragon fails to understand the power dynamics that Vladimir presumes operate in their relationship: Estragon is simply ignorant of them in spite of the fact that they are there. If they were not, there would be nothing for Vladimir to play *with* in these moments. The anxiety and pain that the two cause one another cannot be separated from each of their brief attempts at masculine hegemony because, as McMullan reminds us, issues of gender and power cannot be separated.

The purpose of this essay has been to outline a network of power dynamics in *Waiting for Godot* that are embedded in a larger culture that recognizes those power dynamics as having gendered undertones. I contend that these power dynamics are significant components of Pozzo’s, Vladimir’s, and Estragon’s existential dread, and that these dynamics provide useful language for Godot’s influence over the characters and audience. Though what I have described here focuses on *Waiting for Godot’s* characters as specifically masculine characters, this in no way runs counter to my political stance that anybody, regardless of gender, ought to be able to perform any of the play’s characters. Not only does Butler’s gender performativity theory substantiate a philosophical position that bodies perceived as one kind of gender are very capable of successfully performing another gender such that they are another gender, but even if these characters were performed as female *characters* (not merely by non-male actors) this network of power I have described would not be ignored, or even violated. Playing any of these characters as women would certainly augment and develop each character’s position in this power

hierarchy because this hierarchy is composed of the power necessarily present in gender differences. These power relations are a deep component of this play, and would not disappear, become irrelevant, or in any way be lost to such an artistic decision. They would instead mold to become a component of how such a performance with female characters operates thematically. In fact, such a performance would be incredibly useful for better understanding the limits and properties of this network of power. Played differently, experimental performances such as the De Haarlemse Toneelschuur production contribute to a collective understanding of what the play is and does. What I have described here is necessarily incomplete without such experimental productions, and without the freedom to have them. ✨

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The Reader's Complicity: Universality in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *The Laramie Project*, and  
*The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*

In an interview with *Djurens Ratt*, J. M. Coetzee said that “In order to be cruel we have to close our hearts to the suffering of the other” (Coetzee “Animals”). Over and over, we see societies act in unbelievably cruel ways towards those they have placed outside their community. Three works that demonstrate societies that are violent and cruel towards the “Other,” those outside the normal community, are Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* (hereafter referred to as *WB*) and Moisés Kaufman’s *The Laramie Project* and *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* (hereafter referred to as *LP* and *LPTYL*, respectively). The latter two works are entirely specific, rooted in the murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming—based on real events and scripted from interviews with actual residents of Laramie. The members of Kaufman’s Tectonic Theatre Project interviewed residents of Laramie in the immediate aftermath of the Matthew Shepard hate crime and again ten years later for the second play, *LP-TYL*. The plays include both recaps of the night when Matthew Shepard was tied to a fence and beaten by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, two long-time Laramie residents, and the reflections of all those interviewed by Kaufman and his team. On the opposite end of the fiction spectrum from *LP* and *LPTYL*, *WB* is an almost allegorical tale of an Empire colony that has suppressed the native “barbarians.” Although the novel is clearly reflecting on colonizing practices of some kind, the protagonist is an unnamed magistrate in an unspecified location. The entire novel refrains from naming specific people or places, although it is often hypothesized to be an allegory for the oppression in South Africa where Coetzee grew up. The novel, maintaining complete universality with the lack of naming, follows the magistrate as he slowly realizes the inhumanity of the Empire in the face of the increasingly evident humanity of the barbarians. At the end of the novel, the magistrate, having been left in a colonial outpost that has destroyed itself while defending against fictitious barbarian raids, is uncertain if there is hope for a renewed society.

In all three works, those who are considered the “Other” or outside of the community are dehumanized by the community or society that they belong to: the “barbarians” in *WB* and Matthew Shepard as a homosexual male in *LP* and *LPTYL*. By dehumanizing the “Other,” the colonizing or dominant group is able to maintain its distance and humanity in opposition to what it considers the savagery or inhumanity of the “Other.” As critical theorist Abdul R. JanMohamed writes about the literature of colonization: “the fact that this overt aim, embedded as an assumption in all colonialist literature, is accompanied in colonialist texts by a more vociferous insistence, indeed by a fixation, upon the savagery and the evilness of the native should alert us to the real function of these texts: to justify imperial occupation and exploitation” (62). Dehumanization becomes a way for the societies in the works to justify the violence they show towards the “Other,” although certain members of the community in each work respectively begin to develop a recognition of the humanity of those the society as a whole has sentenced to be the “Other.” For example, select residents of Laramie refer to Matthew Shepard in more humane terms, and in *WB*, the magistrate attempts to connect with and understand the barbarians. However, the residents of Laramie take no action towards truly understanding Matthew, and the magistrate fails in his attempts to understand and speak for the barbarians. Linda Alcoff claims that one of the problems in trying to speak for others from a privileged position is that it could further marginalize them (7). That seems to be the problem that the magistrate faces as he attempts to understand the barbarian woman he has taken into his bed. Although the reader’s initial reaction to the dehumanization of the “Other” through language is horror and disbelief, the narrative structures in all three works draw the reader along the same path as the magistrate follows in *WB*: a path that slowly leads to the realization of one’s own resemblance to the barbarians’ colonizers and one’s own complicity in the dehumanization of the “Other.” The realization that the readers themselves are complicit in the violent narratives told by societies brings about a sense of helplessness, rendering a passive reaction as readers realize their ultimate failure in attempting to speak for the “Other.”

### **Dehumanizing Language**



One way those who belong to the privileged community (in *LP*, the long-time, typically heterosexual residents of Laramie) distance themselves from those outside the community, considered to be the “Other,” is by implicitly dehumanizing them through language. In the first “moment” or section of *LP*, the writers present Sergeant Hing’s description of the case: “the incident happened with that boy” (Kaufman *LP* 6). Hing uses very general terms (“incident” and “that boy”) to refer to what happened to Matthew, which creates distance and gives Hing the ability to separate himself from the crime completely. In a later moment, titled “Live and Let Live,” university student Aaron Kreifels expresses that he feels “bad that it happened to Matthew Shepard, you know, as a human, but (*pause*) [he doesn’t] feel like more sympathetic toward the gay community because of it” (55). The distinction between Matthew as “human” and as part of the “gay community,” emphasized by the pause, implies that being a part of the gay community does not fall under the human label. The distinction between the gay community and the rest of Laramie is reiterated on the very next page, as Murdock Cooper, a rancher in a nearby town, comments: “You don’t pick up regular people,” in reference to the possibility of Matthew’s being partially to blame for the crimes against him (56). By saying that those in the gay community should not try to “pick up regular people,” Cooper places “regular people” in opposition to those in the gay community. This implies that the gay community is an abnormality, and reduces its members to being less than human. As performance theorist Stephen Bottoms puts it, “the play . . . reminds audiences of the need to question the assumptions buried in disarmingly ‘everyday’ turns of phrase, which lie at the root of very real violence” (66). The dehumanization of Matthew Shepard may seem harmless enough, but that distance between the Laramie residents and those considered the “Other” has real consequences.

The dehumanization of Matthew Shepard is even explicitly pointed out by Romaine Patterson, a gay activist friend of Matthew, at the end of *LPTYL*: “There’s Matt who I knew and the good friend that I had, and then there’s Matthew Shepard . . . and Matthew Shepard is not necessarily about Matt, it’s about a community’s reaction” (Kaufman *LPTYL* 187). Here, Patterson is pointing out that the incident has taken a life of its own in the name of Matthew Shepard, rather than reflecting Matt’s unique humanity. People hear Matthew Shepard and think about the homosexual hate crime or the

alleged drug crime, but very few can picture the individual person who Matt was. However easily Laramie residents are able to distance themselves from Matthew, the victim, they have a much harder time creating the same distance from those they consider to be their own: Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, the two men convicted of Matthew's murder. Former lawyer and critical theorist Casey Charles asserts that "though the 'natives' try to distance themselves from Aaron and Russell, they pity them, bursting into tears when they come to court for arraignment" (241). The residents of Laramie have known the two defendants since they were kids: it becomes incredibly hard to separate themselves from two heterosexual members of the community, those not considered to be the "Other." As Marge Murray, the mother of one of the responding police officers, reflects, "I think about Henderson. And you know two absolutely human beings cause so much grief for so many people" (Kaufman *LP* 52). By referencing McKinney and Henderson as "absolutely human beings," Marge closes the gap between them and the rest of Laramie, acknowledging their humanity in a way that very few of the residents will do for Matthew Shepard. The dehumanizing effects of the language that Laramie residents use to talk about Matthew have further aligned them with the defendants, the executors of violence.

In the same way that the very language the residents of Laramie use in *LP* when talking about the Matthew Shepherd case lends itself to the dehumanizing view the town takes towards homosexual individuals, the title the barbarians are given in Coetzee's *WB* dehumanizes them and distances them from the citizens of the Empire. As JanMohamed argues, "In the manichean world of the colonizer and the colonized, of the master and the slave, distance tends to become absolute and qualitative . . . . The world is perceived in terms of ultimate, fixed differences" (70). There can be no similarity between the suppressor and the suppressed in order to maintain distance between the two groups and the superiority of the suppressor. As the Colonel prepares to publicly beat some of the barbarian prisoners, he "steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. [The magistrate reads] the words upside down: *ENEMY*" (Coetzee *WB* 105). The connotation of the word "enemy" invokes an image of violent people who must be beaten down, lest they bring harm to those in the community. The black charcoal it is written in only adds to the image of dark, dirty, and savage people, leaving little room for identifying with the barbarian

prisoners as anything except pure enemy, certainly not as fellow humans.

Even very early in *WB*, before much of the violence has taken place, the colonized people are seen as the “Other.” As the magistrate remembers, “last year stories began to reach us from the capital of unrest among the barbarians . . . . The barbarian tribes were arming” (8). Those who are not a part of the Empire are always referred to as “barbarian,” which connotes a savage, violent image. Calling their group a “tribe” also places them in stark opposition to any sort of civilization, as they live more in nature than the citizens of the Empire. In fact, the only time that the barbarians are referenced as human is when the magistrate attempts to defend the prisoners that the Colonel has just beaten and cries out, “Look at these men! . . . *Men!*” (107). The repetition of the word “men” is meant to emphasize the humanity of the prisoners, to negate the inhuman image of the barbarian. The magistrate’s recognition stands in stark opposition to the rest of the Empire’s view of the barbarians. As JanMohamed describes the normal stance of those in the Empire, “The potentiality and even the humanity of the native are considered momentary aberrations that will inevitably subside and return him to his innate, inhuman barbarity” (69). Citizens of the Empire will always choose to ignore the humanity of those they wish to suppress, even with momentary glimpses of that humanity.

### **Justification and Recognition**

As the respective communities in the three works are inadvertently dehumanizing the “Other,” that dehumanizing language creates a distance between the community and the “Other,” and feeds into the preexisting prejudice in society against the “Other.” JanMohamed argues that “the relation between imperial ideology and fiction is not unidirectional: the ideology does not simply determine the fiction. Rather, through a process of symbiosis, the fictions *forms* the ideology by articulating and justifying the position and aims of the colonist” (83). In *Laramie*, the residents create a fiction about the existing culture that lends itself directly to the suppression of the homosexual community. While the very words that come out of the residents’ mouths dehumanize and separate the gay community from the rest of *Laramie*, the residents simultaneously deny that the culture of *Laramie* is anything but accepting to all people. Another one of Aaron McKinney’s friends, Jen, states that Aaron had

no problem with members of the gay community, “As long as it didn’t come up” (Kaufman *LP* 59). Although perhaps Jen’s statement might appear to be supporting Aaron’s supposed tolerance for the gay community, she is really saying that Aaron had no problems with something he did not know about. That denial of existence is far closer to ignorance than any form of acceptance. Looking at the ways in which the law itself justifies violence, Charles writes that the law “allow[s] the victim’s sexual orientation to justify violence, in part through the sanction of insanity defenses as well as its official condemnation of same-sex desire in sodomy laws” (233). While the law may not blatantly outlaw same-sex desire, it allows violence in response to expression of that desire, essentially repeating exactly what McKinney says: there is no problem with same-sex desire as long as no one knows about it or sees it. Not only does that sentiment display Laramie’s denial of a prejudiced culture, but it also denies that the “Other” even exists.

Even an officer of the law in Laramie, Sergeant Hing, promotes the same ignorance ideal, declaring that Laramie is “pretty much: Live and let live” (Kaufman *LP* 43). The phrase “Live and let live” may give off a positive connotation of peaceful interaction and acceptance, but what it boils down to is that everyone remains at peace if no one is forced to confront or even acknowledge the existence of those considered to be “Others.” As long as everyone appears to be a typical member of the Laramie community, there will be no problems. In a later ABC *20/20* story, the show “recasts Laramie as a town with a drug, not a hate problem . . . . ABC’s story, whether by design or not, participates in a larger movement toward cultural suppression of the homosexual agenda, as its opponents call it” (Charles 229). Despite years passing, which might allow for potential reflection on the causes of the Matthew Shepard incident, residents support the hypothesis that it was a drug crime rather than a crime supported by a deep-seated societal prejudice—a view that leaves the integrity of Laramie intact. Even the head of the University of Wyoming theater department, Rebecca Hilliker, buys into the picture perfect view of Laramie. Near the beginning of the first moment in the play, the writers present Hilliker’s reflection on Laramie: “people here were nicer . . . because they were happy. They were glad the sun was shining. And it shines a lot here” (Kaufman *LP* 4). The image of the sun shining over Laramie connotes the happiness and kindness Hilliker sees in the town. Placing that impression at the

beginning of the play immediately shows the audience what the residents of Laramie choose to see when they examine their culture. The fact that it is a university professor, an educated individual, enabling this view expresses just how deep-seated the denial in Laramie remains. As Charles claims, “If panic finds its motivation in groundless ‘fictions’ about the aggressive, recruiting gay male, then the law’s legitimization of that fiction reveals the serious dangers behind these narratives of prejudice”—especially the denial of those narratives, which allows Laramie to maintain its sense of humanity in the face of the violent actions its societal prejudice has legitimized for McKinney and Henderson (236).

Just as Laramie residents create a narrative that denies the existence of prejudice in their culture, servants of the Empire living in denial of the barbarians’ humanity in *WB* are able to justify their violence against the “Other.” Susan VanZanten Gallagher argues that the “magistrate sees both Joll and Mandel [the Empire’s representatives in the novel] as types of Pilate, who must somehow absolve themselves of the responsibility for their dreadful acts” (282). By turning a blind eye to the Empire’s atrocities against the barbarians, they are able to maintain a semblance of humanity in the midst of what are actually quite barbaric actions. In the first paragraph of the novel, the reader is introduced to the Colonel’s symbolic blindness. As the Colonel approaches, the magistrate observes his sunglasses, noting “The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them” (Coetzee *WB* 1). Calling the lenses “dark” and “opaque” implies that, while the Colonel can still see with these glasses, he sees with a dark and clouded vision, one that may not be completely accurate. Gallagher argues that the Colonel “represent[s] some kind of moral vacuum, an absence that is reflected in [his] eyes” (283). However, the symbolic blindness of the Colonel seems to be more of a way to ignore or justify his violent actions than a complete absence of a moral compass. The magistrate goes on to say “We do not discuss the reason for his being here . . . . Instead we talk about hunting” (Coetzee *WB* 1). While avoiding deeper topics of discussion is not literal blindness, that avoidance can be seen as, rather, a symbolic blindness as neither man is willing to address anything more serious than hunting in their pursuit of denial.

The magistrate brings up the sunglasses again not two pages later when the Colonel is addressing a barbarian boy: “He must think you are a blind man” (Coetzee *WB* 3). The potential for the

Colonel being confused for a blind man within the first few pages of the novel solidifies the association for the reader between servants of the Empire and blindness. The same association of the Colonel's dark lenses with blindness surfaces again much later in the novel. When the Colonel takes over and calls him into his office, the magistrate relates that "I stare into the black lenses. He goes on" (110). This reference to "black lenses" is immediately followed by the Colonel's theory about the magistrate's communication through wooden slips with the barbarians, which the reader knows is not true. The immediacy of the falsehood after an image of "black lenses" implies that the Colonel is still hiding behind his constantly clouded vision, choosing to see what he wants to see.

Although the Colonel, the main character, is presented as blind, the reader can see the inevitability of others following his lead on his stance towards the barbarians. As the guards are riding out to defend against the barbarians in the bright sun, one of the guards "looks sternly ahead through a strip of smoked glass glued to a stick which he holds up before his eyes in imitation of his leader" (Coetzee *WB* 13-14). The "smoked glass" suggests the same kind of clouded vision that the Colonel has embraced; his vision is spreading. Even the magistrate himself indirectly admits to succumbing to the temptation to turn a blind eye like the other servants of the Empire. When he orders the prisoners to be released near the beginning of the novel, he says "I last saw them five days ago (if I can claim ever to have seen them, if I ever did more than pass my gaze over their surface absently, with reluctance)" (24). The parallel structure of the magistrate's sentence suggests the habitual nature of the Empire's servants refusing to truly look at the prisoners and the atrocities that are happening on the frontier.

The perpetual blindness that the servants of the Empire exhibit throughout the novel is what enables them to preserve a sense of their humanity while they are hunting and torturing the barbarian "Others." In the first paragraph of the novel, the Colonel suggests that his sunglasses prevent headaches and wrinkles, and the magistrate observes "It is true. He has the skin of a younger man" (Coetzee *WB* 1). The wrinkles of an older person suggests that he or she has lived through trials and bears the wisdom that comes from facing those trials. Therefore, the lack of wrinkles on the Colonel's face implies that he lacks the wisdom and clarity that he should have with his experience and age. While he may present himself as a perfectly civilized servant of the Empire, that status is based on an intentional ignorance.

The choice to remain blind and uninformed about the reality of the frontier situation is represented again later in the novel as the Colonel is questioning the magistrate about the wooden slips. The magistrate walks into his old office and observes that “There are no books or files; the room is starkly empty save for a vase of fresh flowers” (110). The books that the magistrate once kept in that office become symbolic of the truths that the Colonel does not choose to see. Instead, there is only a vase of flowers. While those flowers are aesthetically pleasing in their association with culture and finery, they do nothing to access the truths of the situation.

While the Colonel may be in denial of the ramifications of the violence taken against the barbarians, the magistrate tells the story in a way that “highlights the on-going nature of his ethical awakening and his increasing recognition of his own complicity” in that violence, according to narrative theorist Matthew Delconte (438). While the magistrate may have initially aligned himself fully with the Empire, he appears to be making attempts to understand the barbarians as the novel goes on. As the magistrate talks about excavating the barbarian ruins as his pastime, he describes one of the things they recurrently come across in excavations: “I also found a cache of wooden slips on which are painted characters in a script I have not seen the like of . . . Now, in the hope of deciphering the script, I have set about collecting all the slips I can” (Coetzee *WB* 15). The slips with what can only be assumed to be barbarian writing on them become symbolic of the barbarian culture as a whole—the first instance of the magistrate’s attempt to understand or possibly even connect with the barbarians. JanMohamed writes that, in a Manichean world, the “world is perceived in terms of ultimate, fixed differences,” one of which is literate versus illiterate in typical colonial discourse (70). The introduction of the idea that the barbarians might be literate after all forms a small thread of connection between them and the magistrate, planting the seed for recognition of the barbarians’ humanity.

Although the magistrate approaches his attempt at understanding with good intentions, Alcott argues that no one can transcend his or her social position to neutrally speak for the other (14). For the magistrate, who at least was privileged in the beginning of the novel, trying to understand the barbarians from his position could serve to further marginalize them. Take, for example, his relationship with the barbarian woman and his attempts to understand her. Much as with the slips of barbarian

writing, the magistrate has made it his mission to come to an understanding of the barbarian woman: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (Coetzee *WB* 31). The magistrate uses the same word “decipher” in reference to both the slips of writing and the woman, reducing her to the rest of the barbarians he is trying to decipher when he should recognize her humanity most of all. In associating the barbarian woman with the wooden slips, he is also reducing her to the equivalent of an inanimate object, entirely inhuman and in need of interpretation. As Michael Valdez Moses so aptly points out, “during the time that he keeps the barbarian woman in his house and bed, he never takes the time to learn her tongue” (120). Perhaps learning the barbarian woman’s tongue would have given him a greater potential for transcending his position and understanding or speaking for her people, but he fails to do so, and thus fails in his repeated attempts at understanding.

While the magistrate in *WB* embarks on a slow, more solitary journey to see the barbarians as more human than enemy, the recognition of Matthew Shepard’s humanity in *LP* comes much more painfully. Despite the inadvertent denial of the community regarding the role of Laramie’s culture in the Matthew Shepherd crimes, the writers provide the audience with moments where certain individuals possess a glimmer of recognition of the destructive dehumanization that continues to exist in Laramie. As Russell Henderson’s landlady, Sherry Aanenson, contemplates his actions, she tells the interviewers, “I just want to shake him, you know, what were you thinking? What in the hell were you thinking?” (32). The repetition of the last phrase paired with the addition of the expletive “hell,” reveals Aanenson’s escalating emotions as she realizes her lack of understanding. Her confusion and distress are representative of the way many Laramie residents must feel under the surface, as they outwardly engage in denial for some relief from the kind of emotion Aanenson displays.

Another member of the community who reflects the confusion about and the recognition of the gravity of what McKinney and Henderson have done is Aaron Kreifels, the one who found Matthew at the fence. As Kreifels remembers, “But when I saw hair, well I knew it was a human being” (Kaufman *LP* 33). It is very significant that Kreifels labels Matthew as a human being. It points out that lying there, dying in the dirt, Matthew was indistinguishable from the other members of the human



race. The doctor who treated Matthew, Dr. Cantway, reiterates this affirmation of Matthew's humanity immediately afterwards, describing his injuries as ones that "you don't expect to see . . . from someone doing this to another person" (34). Dr. Cantway's use of the word "person" again emphasizes that Matthew is indeed human, like every other member of the Laramie community, and by saying, "another person," he points out the common humanity of Matthew and Aaron McKinney specifically.

### **Anywhere, Anytime**

After seeing the majority of the characters in the three works justify the violence they commit, in contrast to the magistrate's and certain Laramie residents' recognition of their own complicity, readers would normally be able to distance themselves from the story and condemn the atrocities from a morally superior vantage point. However, the narrative structures that promote universality in the works prevent the reader from achieving a more distant view of what is happening in the stories. The readers are drawn into the works, as if they were a part of the story, and slowly come to realize their own complicity in the process of dehumanizing the "Other," just like the magistrate and many Laramie residents. As Charles puts it, "*The Laramie Project* at certain moments establishes a model that understands the murder of Matt Shepard as a crime not of a flawed individual but of a social fabric" (247). In resisting the urge to portray only a specific story, the Tectonic Theater Project presents the story of a society that allowed this crime to occur in the first place. As a journalist in Laramie reveals, "People would like to think that what happened to Matthew was an exception to the rule, but it was an extreme version of what happens in our schools on a daily basis" (Kaufman *LP* 45). In a rare admittance of the town's complicity in the Matthew Shepard incident, the journalist brings to light the daily violence that gets ignored as it builds up to something like what happened with Matthew.

Although *LP* could not get much more specific with setting and characters, it creates a sense of universal thematic content by resisting telling the story of Matthew Shepard in chronological order. Instead, the authors choose to tell the story in a series of moments, which can be defined as "short sequences of action, based on raw interview text, that have been isolated and developed in rehearsal so as to foreground theatrical imagery as a complementary means of storytelling, on par with verbal

content” (Bottoms 64). Rather than dividing the sections of the play by location and set, the moments divide the action of the play by theme. Some of the moment titles include: “A Scarf,” “The Fence,” and “Live and Let Live” (Kaufman *LP* 24, 32, 55). The titles of the moments are not necessarily specific to Laramie. The scarf, fence, or phrase could be found in any place, at any time, shedding light on the universal nature of what happened to Matthew Shepard. While the audience might want to think the crimes can be contained to Laramie, structuring the play with universally applicable moment titles extends the hate behind the crime beyond Laramie and into the world at large.

Not only does the play opt for a story told through moments rather than in chronological order, but it also includes material that recognizes the artistic choices that influence even a realistic play like *LP*, calling into question the legitimacy and truth of history filtered through words and time. In an early moment of the play, “Journal Entries,” Tectonic Theater Company member Amanda Gronich admits that “I’ve never done anything remotely like this in my life. How do you get people to talk to you?” (Kaufman *LP* 8). Her admission of uncertainty undermines her authority as one of the playwrights to a certain extent, revealing the company members’ hesitations going into the project. Bottoms posits that “The inclusion of such material invites audiences to question the role and assumptions of the interviewer-actors and writer-director in making the piece, just as they are asked to scrutinize the words of their interviewees” (65) and is a “way of reminding audiences that history itself is necessarily complex, uncertain, and always already theatricalized” (67). The authors’ admittance of uncertainty reminds the audience that, although the words they are hearing are certainly not made up since they came from real interviews, they are absolutely artistically tainted, both by the interviewees themselves filtering their thoughts for the members of the Tectonic Theatre Project, and by the interviewer-actors, who arranged the words in a specific order to present to an audience. It again brings up Alcott’s question of being able to speak for others and her assertion that one always has to be careful when representing others. For example, at the very end of *LP*, the Catholic priest in Laramie, Father Roger Schmit, appeals to the Tectonic Theater Members: “I will trust that if you write a play of this, that you will say it right. You need to do your best to say it correct” (Kaufman *LP* 98). The repetition of the phrase “say it right” with the shift to “correct” the second time emphasizes the importance of

accurate representation when conveying the words of another, which Father Roger Schmit can recognize and acknowledge, even without being an artist himself.

While *LP* sheds light on the incomplete accuracy of historical representation, *WB* appears to ignore history completely in favor of a nonspecific, entirely universal setting and characters. As Lynn Meskell and Lindsay Weiss argue, “It is not that Coetzee refuses historical responsibility (contra JanMohamed 1985), because his lead character takes personal responsibility and suffers the same injustices as the supposed barbarians” (91). The idea here is that Coetzee was not trying to avoid history or bypass any responsibility for atrocities in the novel, but rather to universalize it for a purpose. Meskell and Weiss go on to say that “the author’s refusal to historicize the suffering of the dispossessed is a refusal to allow the reader to digest this suffering and then forget it” (91). Because the story is not located in a specific place or time, the reader cannot observe the atrocities and then leave them behind in their specified setting: there is nowhere for the reader to let them go. The magistrate demonstrates this aspect of narration late in the novel when he debates writing down the history of the barbarians. He reflects, “I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them” (Coetzee *WB* 154). The magistrate is refusing to write down the history of the barbarians lest it limit their story to the view of the Empire, to their specific situation in history that would become fixed and inapplicable in the future were it to be written down in concrete terms when truly the violence spans throughout time.

In creating a more universal tale with *WB*, “Coetzee conveniently sidesteps the political in favor of a moral stance, in which the heart of darkness is possible in all societies” (Meskell & Weiss 91). Many have hypothesized that the novel is an allegory for atrocities committed in South Africa, but the allegory seems to be more for societies in general, one of the reasons this novel is still a classic today. Anne Waldron Neumann describes Coetzee’s narrative as being “couched in the present tense rather than the historic past (the historic past that figuratively washes its hands of events because they are over and done with, because they are *history*)” (76). The magistrate acknowledges the problem of creating a history for the barbarians in some of his later reflections in the novel: “Empire has created the time of history.

Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end . . . . Empire dooms itself to live in history” (Coetzee *WB* 133). The parallel structure of “rise and fall, of beginning and end” reflects the repetitive nature of history, even as the Empire tries to contain it in a historical setting. Therefore, Coetzee universalizing his work gets at the truth of history more than any specific setting ever could.

Another advantage to using present tense narration rather than a historical past tense is that it draws the reader into the story. As Delconte explains, “I term this phenomenon particular to simultaneous present tense narration the *absentee narratee*: the illusion (maintained by both narrator and author) that someone within the story world is listening to the narrative even though the narrative structure does not accommodate that someone” (433). For example, as the magistrate is sitting in his cell alone, he says, “I lie in the reek of old vomit obsessed with the thought of water” (Coetzee *WB* 115). Obviously, since he is alone in his cell, there is no one else within the novel to whom he is telling his story. However, the use of present tense insists that the magistrate is saying these things in the moment they are happening and is not talking to himself. The absence of a listener forces the reader to become that listener as there is “nothing within the fictional construct to buffer us (the authorial audience)... [We are] made complicit ourselves in a large part because of our role as audience, because ‘we listened’” (Delconte 443, 440). Readers find themselves active participants in the story, pulled into the barbaric actions of the Empire by being listeners for the magistrate rather than observing him telling the story to another listener—one less degree of separation for the reader.

An additional effect is that “The magistrate’s present tense also records his ongoing struggle to narrate oppression, to discover how—*if*—one can speak for those with no voice of their own without imposing a voice on them” (Neumann 77). Alcoff would argue that there is no neutral position; therefore, it is impossible to speak for the “Other” without imposing some portion of one’s own position on them (6-7). The magistrate seems to agree with Alcoff. After he has written out a plea for the barbarians, he says, “For a long while I stare at the plea I have written. It would be disappointing to know that the poplar slips I have spent so much time on contain a message as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible as this” (Coetzee *WB* 154). While the poplar slips of the barbarians are literally written

in a different language, that interpretable writing becomes symbolic of the uncertainty with which we must hear history and stories told by those speaking for the “Other.” The parallel structure of “as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible” again suggests the repetitive universality of history, tainted in its telling and retelling over time.

While realizing his own failures to accurately communicate the history of the barbarians, the magistrate also begins to associate himself with the Empire and its atrocities. As he reflects, “For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite of the cold, rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two sides of imperial rule, no more, no less” (Coetzee *WB* 135). The magistrate has a desire to be different from the Colonel, to gain a moral superiority and understanding of the people the Empire has suppressed. However, in this moment, he realizes his own complicity in the suppression of the barbarians. Gallagher asserts that “Those who passively allow torture and oppression to take place are just as much Barbarians as the torturers” (285). Although the magistrate makes half-hearted attempts to understand the barbarians and identify their humanity, he never truly takes successful action against the Empire, becoming partially responsible for the suppression and torture of the barbarians. The reader is then drawn into his complicity by being his active listener throughout the entire work. However, the magistrate does not place blame or guilt on either himself or the reader. As he says, “in this farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian” (Coetzee *WB* 104). The inclusion of the phrase “in his heart” suggests that, even if the magistrate and the readers are complicit in the suppression of the “Other,” their intentions were never harmful. Despite that bit of relief, the realization of their own complicity has an effect on the readers. Moses comments on the gravity of the realizations: “Were the complicity of the magistrate in the history of Empire merely a matter of his personal culpability, or more broadly, an indictment of his particular caste, class, or faction—the liberal element within a repressive regime—Coetzee’s novel would be significantly less disturbing, and I think, less profound” (122). It is not the mere atrocities that sit with the reader, but the universality and the inclusion of his or her own contributions to the story that linger in the reader’s mind.

### Conclusions

In all three works, even the realization of the reader's inclusion in the story and complicity fail to bring about significant change and the end of each piece is left in an ambiguous state—the reader is uncertain if there is hope for the future in either Laramie or the Empire's outpost. As Jonas Slonaker, gay resident of Laramie, so pointedly asks, "What's come out of it? What's come out of this that's concrete or lasting?" (Kaufman *LP* 97). The repetition of the initial question gives off an almost desperate and hopeless tone, shoving the lack of response in Laramie at the audience members, who are left with no answer following that question. Moses writes that after reading *WB* "we must take an extremely dim view of the possibility of historical progress, of the development of a genuinely just and humane society" (123). Gallagher agrees, concluding that "Coetzee also points to the moral vacuum that allows torture to exist in the contemporary world" (278). But if the messages in the works are only that the world is a hopeless place doomed to subjugate the "Other" forever, then what would be the point? What would be the benefit of such a bleak realization?

Although the works certainly do paint a bleak picture of the human capacity for violence and dehumanization of the "Other," that is not all that the works have to offer. Moses posits that "the magistrate intends to represent for posterity both the enlightened hope at which his civilization aimed and its failure to fulfill those hopes" (119). The magistrate does demonstrate the failure of trying to speak for the "Other," but *WB* does not leave it at that. At the very end of the novel, the magistrate observes that "The wind has dropped, and now the snowflakes come floating down, the first fall of the year, flecking the rooftiles with white . . . . In the middle of the square there are children at play building a snowman. Anxious not to alarm them, but inexplicably joyful, I approach them across the snow" (155). The connotation of the white snow is of a fresh start, and the magistrate's inexplicable joy implies that all is well at the outpost. That fresh, clean slate of an image promises hope for the Empire's outpost. Some contend that this final scene of the novel is just a dream, but whether it is a dream or not makes no difference. The important thing is that, through the recognition by certain individuals of their own complicity in dehumanizing the "Other," change may be possible. As Father Roger Schmit so aptly points out in *LP*, "Dyke! Yeah, dyke! Do you realize that is violence? That is the seed of violence"

(63). Words are the beginning of violence. The language of a culture and a community's views hold more power than any society cares to admit, providing dangerous incentives and grounding for the hate crimes and atrocities that were done against the barbarians, Matthew Shepard, and any other group or individual seen as the "Other" in the world today. ✨

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Blind with Superstition, Cursed with Illusions: Masculinity and War in Bierce's "Chickamauga"

"[T]his is a world of fools and rogues, blind with superstition...cursed  
with illusions—frothing mad!"  
—Ambrose Bierce, "To Train a Writer"

Ambrose Bierce once declared of the dismal state of the human condition: "I have no love to waste upon the irreclaimable mass of brutality that we know as 'mankind.' Compassion, yes—I am sincerely sorry that they are brutes" (*Letters* 4). Serving as a topographical engineer in the American Civil War, Bierce experienced the death and destruction in some of the most infamous battles of the war and later used that experience with "brutality" to expose the failings of romanticizing and glorifying war in his writings. While many readers are solely intrigued by Ambrose Bierce's disappearance and involvement in the Mexican Civil War with such revolutionaries as Pancho Villa, it was his experiences with the American Civil War that influenced his often pessimistic writings in both fiction and journalism. Bierce's cynical works, many of which contained ruthless criticisms of pro-war propagandists, earned him the moniker "Bitter Bierce" (Brower). In his graphic works decrying the "virtues" of war, Bierce explored ideals of heroism and glory and his estrangement from them after carrying a wounded soldier from a battlefield only to watch the soldier die after rescue (Brower). In his 1891 short story "Chickamauga," he recreates this ambivalence in a scathing anti-war allegory as two worlds, one with a child's naiveté and innocence and one with the tangible loss of war, collide with catastrophic results. Bierce uses a deaf-mute child to represent the naïve young soldiers in the Civil War in order to assert that it is society's obsession with proving masculinity through war that leads men into battle, only to have them come out the other side finding their ideals to have been grotesquely distorted, if they survive at all.

David Yost has shown that in the late nineteenth century, with the increase of male alcoholism and the expansion of the feminist movement, many Americans began to recognize a “degeneration” in masculinity (247). In their efforts to stave off this degeneration, “masculinity became increasingly defined as an aggressive and physical activism as opposed to the previous emphasis on self-discipline and responsibility” (247). It was this changing ideal of masculinity, one that required men to prove themselves in some of the most violent ways possible, that Bierce fought to stifle. With their virility called into question, these men, and in many cases, boys, killed their fellow Americans in the name of glory and heroism, with many sacrificing their own lives in their endeavor to prove themselves courageous. Twenty-some years after the battle of Chickamauga, Bierce described the harmful effects of war stories that depict battle as glorious in a “Prattle” column on January 23, 1886: “these battle yarns, indeed, are nursing a baby war, which now lies mouthing its fat knuckles and marking time with its pinky feet, in a cradle of young imaginations, but in another decade it will be striding through the land in seven-language boots, chewing soap.” This depiction of war as a baby feeding off of the stories about glorious battles and heroic deeds, tainting the minds of America’s naïve youth, expresses Bierce’s unwillingness to glorify war, while also justifying his “bitter” moniker. Bierce’s idea of young minds being corrupted by exaggerated tales is exemplified in “Chickamauga,” as the central consciousness is not one of the young soldiers who Bierce depicts in the quote above, but rather a child, struggling to live up to the stories of battle and bravery he saw in his picture books.

The Battle of Chickamauga took place September 19-20, 1863, and while the Confederate army declared it a triumph, Donald T. Blume has called the campaign a “Pyrrhic victory,” as the high number of casualties on the southern side all but undermined the idea of triumph (134). Estimates of northern casualties totaled 16,179, while the “victorious” south lost an estimated 14,328, but rather than describing the high death tolls and large scale destruction of the actual battle, Bierce chose to depict the war through the eyes of a boy playing in the forest (134). Just as many young soldiers were swayed to war through a desire to prove themselves, the boy of Bierce’s story ventures into the woods to mimic “the postures of aggression and defense that he had been taught” (“Chickamauga” 625). The narrator describes how the boy’s father “had fought against naked savages and followed the flag of his

country into the capital of a civilized race to the far South” (625). Here Bierce recounts one of many persuasions used to drive men to war, stating that it is a part of their heritage, an inheritance that “once kindled, is never extinguished” (625). The six-year-old boy wanders into the woods, a foreign land, just as the soldiers of the Civil War traveled away from the familiarity of their homes. Yet in spite of bearing their weapons bravely as the boy does with his wooden sword, they are merely playing at war.

Bierce’s juxtaposition of a six-year-old boy pretend-fighting in the woods with the young soldiers fighting in the Civil War serves not only to illustrate the “brutalization of innocence in war time” but also to further the idea that many of the soldiers, with their lack of understanding of war’s true impact, are merely playing at war, vanquishing invisible foes with reckless conviction until they experience destruction first-hand (Blume 135). As Bierce demanded in another “Prattle” column, “study the history and literature of any vanquished people immediately before the war in which they were humbled and you will find that they held the strongest convictions possible” (“Prattle” Feb. 3, 1889). Here Bierce is clearly identifying the inability of not only the Confederates, but any soldier who loses a battle, to see or even predict defeat because of their inflated ideals of glory and national pride. This statement also holds true for the boy in the woods who even in the midst of gore and death fails to realize his misunderstandings until he is “defeated” at the close of the story, with the burning of his home and the brutal death of his mother.

The narrator describes how, after falling asleep in the forest for some time, the boy sees “a strange moving object which he took to be some large animal...he could not name it” (“Chickamauga” 626). The child, who “had seen pictures of bears, but knew of nothing to their discredit,” is emblematic of an ignorance of reality on which war efforts depend (626). Here, Bierce continues to perpetuate the idea of the naiveté of young soldiers who, like the boy, heard tales of war but knew nothing of the character of war personally. The narrator continues to depict the boy’s inexperience, as he comes to recognize that the crawling men, lacking the strength to stand, are indeed men and not animals as he originally thought, but that is where his understanding ends. The narrator states, “[H]e saw little but that these were men, yet crept like babes” and he describes the boy examining the men “with childish curiosity” (627). In his ignorance of war’s ruin the boy fails to comprehend the “face that lacked a lower

jaw” with its “great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone” or the fates of the men “who had paused and did not again go on, but lay motionless” (627). The narrator describes the “dramatic contrast between his laughter and their own ghastly gravity,” referring to the boy’s comparison of the men to clowns in a circus; again, the child bases his conclusions on his very limited knowledge and experience. Just as he guessed at the identity of the men based on pictures of animals he had never encountered, the boy’s only other encounter with men on their hands and knees occurred when his father’s slaves pretended to be horses allowing him to ride on their backs. But when the boy mimics this action by climbing atop the jawless soldier in the woods, the man sinks to the ground, with the boy likening the movement to “an unbroken colt” (627). The child continuously regards the soldiers in animalistic terms, considering one as “a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast” and likening the whole group of soldiers to “a swarm of great black beetles” (627). In this way, the boy dehumanizes the men, another aspect of war that Bierce addresses as the boy leads the men through the woods like a shepherd leading sheep.

When he spots the fire through the trees glinting off the metal adorning the soldier’s uniforms, the boy moves to the front of the men; as the narrator ironically comments, “Surely such a leader never before had such a following” (“Chickamauga” 628). Yost states that “Bierce’s heroes often meet their specially prepared ironic fate because of their traditionally manly virtues” (250), which readers see in “Chickamauga” as the boy’s desire to live up to the “feats of discovery and conquest” of his ancestors puts him on path that destroys his innocence (625). The fire dazzles the young boy, and as he makes his way toward its “growing splendor” he fails to acknowledge the evidence of destruction around him (628). The narrator states once again that “an observer of better experience” would have noticed the footprints and realized that while the child slept, a battle was fought, but the boy, pretending to be a brave leader, marches on toward the flames, never stopping even as the men behind him drown in the river, unable to hold their bodies off the ground (628). Once the boy sees the destruction surrounding the fire, the narrator remarks, “he cared nothing for that,” referring to the boy’s focus on the grandiosity of the blaze, another object he has never encountered before (628). When the boy dances “with glee in imitation of the wavering flames,” a parallel is drawn to the many soldiers who excitedly awaited the

glory they thought lay in battle (628). And just as those men, including Bierce, came to understand the monstrosity of war, the boy finally recognizes his foolish misapprehension, realizing he has danced in front of the burning embers of his own home.

Blume asserts that Bierce's stories focus on the disillusionment not only of soldiers but also of civilians, and such stories as "Chickamauga" serve to show readers that "while this latest crop of men are off playing at war and seeking glory and shiny medals their parents and loved ones may be shelled to death" (150). Bierce's protagonist experiences this revelation as "his little world swung half around; the points of the compass were reversed" ("Chickamauga" 629). The pretend enemies that the boy set out to destroy in the woods destroyed his home and his family while he was away, underscoring the idea that when soldiers leave their homes in search of glory, their families lie unprotected. And just as Bierce claimed, the losing side of the battle doesn't recognize the many signs of defeat until it is too late. The boy sees men unable to stand, drowning for lack of strength, and with grisly wounds, and yet he fails to comprehend his loss until he finds his mother, her head "a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the work of a shell" (629). The child danced in the flames of his own burning house, a grim performance reminiscent of the celebrations of battles like Chickamauga, where revelers would applaud the destruction of their countrymen in willful ignorance of the great losses on their own side.

Following the shocking realization of the death of the boy's mother and the destruction of his home, Bierce ends the story with another revelation: "the child was a deaf mute" (629). While the disillusioned soldiers that Bierce is caricaturing weren't literally deaf and mute, the child's disability fits the allegory, as the soldiers were both deaf to reality and mute in their vain attempts to warn others of the destruction of war. In describing southern soldiers in this way, Bierce stated that the soldier who "endeavored to calm the storms of passion and spare his section the humiliation of inevitable defeat was hissed as a fool and silenced as a traitor" ("Prattle" Feb. 3, 1889). The boy's muteness parallels the voicelessness of these futile advisers, and his deafness represents the failure of the mass of soldiers to heed such warnings due to their obsession with glory and inability to comprehend war as Bierce saw it, a destructive force that draws men in with deceit. Without his hearing, the boy in the woods sleeps through the battle, missing the carnage and destruction that surely would have made him realize that

the men in the woods are not playthings or animals to be commanded but essentially children like himself. The boy cannot hear the groans of men lying nearly dead or the sounds of the men drowning in the stream; instead, the boy's sheltered experience leads him to regard the destruction as a game.

Biographer Vincent Starrett has described a special fear of Bierce's, that of not being heard. Bierce's epithet, "My how my fame rings out in every zone / A thousand critics shouting, 'He's unknown!'" epitomizes this fear, which is also reminiscent of the boy's muteness in "Chickamauga" (qtd. in Starrett 24). And just as the soldiers were unable to express their fears and concerns over war, the boy's muteness in the story is suggestive of Bierce's fear not of having his works ignored, but of his messages about war not being acknowledged. In his poem, "A Warning," Bierce writes, "Cried Age to Youth: 'Abate your speed!— / The distance hither's brief indeed.' / But youth pressed on without delay— / The shout had reached by half the way" (*Shapes* 266). Here Bierce warns the young, soldiers or otherwise, not to actively give up their childhood, and the innocence and naiveté that is associated with it, but his shouts are not heard. The boy, having discovered his mother's body, is described as "making wild, uncertain gestures. He uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries" ("Chickamauga" 629). This depiction represents Bierce's discovery of war's destruction coupled with the fear that he too is mute, and is unable to warn young soldiers against the pro-war propaganda that glorified battle.

This concern for the naiveté and innocence in youth is mirrored in Bierce's interactions with George Sterling, Hermann Scheffauer, and Blanche Partington, young writers whom Bierce mentored after the war. In one of his many letters to Sterling, an American poet and playwright, Bierce declared, "I've a notion you'll find other tragedies among the stars if earth doesn't supply you with high enough themes" (*Letters* 59). Bierce asserts that tragedies can be invented and fictionalized, but Earth provides plenty of tragedies, alluding to the ruin of the Civil War, which he references in his writings. Bierce's warning against relinquishing youth conflates the folly of young soldiers marching off to war with the young writers that Bierce mentored, whom he likely feared would not hear his warnings. For example, after dancing in the fire, the boy "flung in his sword" ("Chickamauga" 628). The gesture is symbolic of his renunciation of the war, but it comes too late, as his mother and home are already gone (628).

While Bierce has figuratively “flung in his sword,” having experienced war and its inherent tragedies, his young friends still retain their child-like outlooks, perpetuating the idea that Bierce’s warning extends beyond the military to the world of writers.

In an 1887 *Examiner* column, Bierce criticized another writer, stating, “If he was ever a boy he knows that the year is divided, not into seasons and months, as is vulgarly supposed, but into ‘top time,’ ‘marble time,’ ‘kite time,’ et cetera, and woe to the boy who ignored the unwritten calendar, amusing himself according to the dictates of an irresponsible conscience” (*Letters* xxii). Bierce continually reminisces about his boyhood and criticizes writers who fail to acknowledge this special time. Bierce laments that children like the boy in “Chickamauga,” orphaned, killed, or pulled into battle, have their childhood abruptly taken from them often without choice, perpetuating the idea that “A Warning” is Bierce’s lament for lost childhood. Bierce describes the deaf-mute boy’s “impressionable mind” and how “instinctively the child turned toward the growing splendor” of the fire (“Chickamauga” 626, 628). The boy is ruled completely by his limited knowledge and his baser instincts, which is a folly for young soldiers and young writers alike. In an 1893 letter to Blanche Partington, Bierce writes, “If you had more experience of life I should regard what you say as entirely conclusive against your possession of any talent of a literary kind. But you are so young and untaught in that way” (*Letters* 3). Here Bierce relates the folly of young soldiers with no experience in war to Blanche’s inexperience in life affecting her writing. Bierce explains the importance of gaining experience, but warns through his young protagonist’s tragedy what can be lost when that experience, whether tragic or otherwise, is obtained. In another letter to Partington, Bierce writes, “The boy needs discipline, control, and work. He needs to learn by experience that life is not all beer and skittles,” referring to his son, Leigh, who was 21 at the time (*Letters* 27-28). After Leigh’s death due to complications from alcoholism, the folly Bierce desired to steer him from, Bierce wrote to Sterling: “Leigh died a year ago this morning. I wish I could stop counting the days” (*Letters* 58). Bierce’s inability to save his son from his vices mirrors his fears of not being heard, and his continued desire to mentor writers like Partington, Sterling, and Sheffauer could well have been an attempt to compensate for his failure to positively influence Leigh.

In describing the rumbling of the earth as the battle of Chickamauga raged on around the

sleeping boy, the narrator notes the presence of “a strange muffled thunder, as if the partridges were drumming in celebration of nature’s victory over the son of her immemorial enslavers” (“Chickamauga” 626). Here the narrator imagines the rumble of the battle as birds drumming to celebrate a victory in the natural world. Bierce personifies nature as a woman who has been enslaved but finds freedom in the midst of battle. This trope may refer to sleep, a natural state, overtaking the young child and sheltering him from the battle, which, had he been awake, likely would have killed him. It might also be referring to the idea that, as Blume puts it, “something as universally human as fear and not romantic aspirations for glory plays a major role in determining the outcome of battles” (145). Fear is a natural human response, an emotion that the boy does not experience until the revelations at the close of the story. Similarly, Bierce stated that in battle, “men do not fight as heroically as they are said to fight; they are not as brave as they are said to be” (“Prattle” Dec. 23, 1888). Nature triumphs as fear destroys the illusions that men have about war. As the soldiers kill and recognize the possibility that they themselves can be killed, fear changes their idealistic views to much more accurate representations of the world, just as the boy recognizes destruction for the first time in light of his mother’s death. The boy in “Chickamauga,” coming to terms with his home’s destruction and his mother’s death, can only stand “motionless, with quivering lips, looking down upon the wreck” (629). The boy no longer dances or laughs, mirroring the impact that the war had on young soldiers who returned home, unable to live as lighthearted and untroubled as they had before.

In “Chickamauga,” Bierce appropriates Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in describing the inability of his protagonist to “curb the lust for war,” just as Napoleon was unable to do (626). In his poem, “An Inscription,” regarding a statue of Napoleon at West Point, Bierce describes Napoleon as “A famous conqueror in battle brave, / Who robbed the cradle to supply the grave. / His reign laid quantities of human dust: / He fell upon the just and the unjust” (*Shapes* 325). Bierce’s line describing war as “robb[ing] the cradle to supply the grave” reiterates the idea that war devastates youth, yet Napoleon’s depiction as a worthy conqueror deserving of a statue perpetuates the misconception that war is glorious. By referencing Byron’s poem, Bierce reiterates the misunderstanding of young soldiers, and their inability to see the reality of war’s destruction because of their lack of experience. Bierce



describes the forest in “Chickamauga” as “the dark inclosing wood” (626). Woods are often motifs for evil and misadventure throughout literature, and just as the bloodied, dying men “would have been noted by an elder observer,” the metaphorical darkness of the forest would have been understood by a protagonist with prior experience with destruction. But such recognition is beyond the scope of this young boy who fears “the long menacing ears of a rabbit” (626).

In a fragment from a letter to an unknown person, Bierce describes a forest reminiscent of the one he describes in “Chickamauga”:

I have told her of a certain “enchanted forest” hereabout to which I feel myself sometimes strongly drawn as a fitting place to lay down “my weary body and head”.... The element of enchantment in that forest is supplied by my wandering and dreaming in it forty-one years ago when I was a-soldiering and there were new things under a new sun. It is miles away, but from a near-by summit I can overlook the entire region—ridge beyond ridge, parted by purple valleys full of sleep. Unlike me, it has not visibly altered in all these years, except that I miss, here and there, a thin blue ghost of smoke from an enemy’s camp. Can you guess my feelings when I view this Dream-land—my Realm of adventure, inhabited by members that beckon me from every valley? I shall go; I shall retrace my old routes and lines of march; stand in my old camps; inspect my battlefields to see that all is right and undisturbed. I shall go to the Enchanted Forest. (*Letters* 204)

Here Bierce’s description of his desire to “lay down” in the enchanted forest mirrors the boy in “Chickamauga,” who, “overcome by fatigue...lay down in a narrow space between two rocks... [and] sobbed himself to sleep” (626). The land of enchantment he discusses is an ironic representation of his wartime experience, but his use of the word *enchantment* suggests that this region could also represent the youth and innocence that he lost during his years as a soldier. In other words, Bierce implies that his wartime self is unaltered, omitting any negative qualities, and his comparison of his unaltered past

to his “visibly altered” present self suggests a desire to return to that time. Based on Bierce’s rejection of the glorification of war, his desire to return to this enchanted wood is a desire to return not to the desolation of war but to youth itself, which Bierce describes as “The Period of Possibility” (“Youth”). As Bierce wrote in a letter to George Sterling, “You are still young enough to profit by the pain; my character is made—my opportunities gone,” perpetuating the idea that the “new sense of freedom from control” that his protagonist feels is worth the tragedy that later befalls him (*Letters* 83, “Chickamauga” 625). Bierce’s advice to Sterling suggests that adventures and misadventures in youth shape who you are, and perhaps Bierce, shaped by war’s destruction and the ambivalence of heroism, was unhappy with his “bitter” character. In his foreword to Bierce’s collection of letters, Sterling recounts how when asked, “You must be very proud, Mr. Bierce, of all your books and your fame?” Bierce responded, “No, you will come to know that all that is worthwhile in life is the love you have had for a few people near you” (*Letters* xxix). This response contrasts with Bierce’s usual cynicism; Bierce’s perpetual focus on youth suggests that his mentoring of young writers was a cathartic act, and a way of overcoming his fear of the muteness suffered by his young protagonist.

As the nineteenth century saw rapid technological and social changes, the United States experienced a masculinity crisis, and the Civil War became an outlet for men to prove their courage and bravery as they were fueled by imagined futures of glory and heroism. Ambrose Bierce, who was once just as naïve as many of the other young men drawn to battle by propaganda that portrayed masculinity as aggression and fighting, later fought to destroy the pro-war ideals of glory and honor through his writings. With “Chickamauga,” Bierce attempted to subvert the romantic ideals of heroism by creating a character who, through his youth, ignorance, deafness, and muteness, parallels the soldiers who marched into battle as an homage to their fathers and grandfathers, only to realize too late that war is not a sacred duty to be passed down, or a badge of courage that must be earned, but rather a negation of the very human values they had believed themselves to be fighting for. ❧

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### James Joyce's *Gnomon* of Pain in "Grace" and "The Dead"

No matter how often we try to enter the light in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), in especially "Grace" and "The Dead," it always eludes us. In fact, the theme of un-touchable light both begins and ends the collection. In the second sentence of "The Sisters," the boy "passed...the lighted square of windows" (9). Similarly, in both "Grace," which had been the conclusion to *Dubliners* in the early manuscripts, and "The Dead," the final one, the theme is continued. In "Grace," the light the characters cannot reach is in the men's mis-remembered papal motto "*Lux upon Lux — Light upon Light*" (129). Finally, in "The Dead," Gabriel tells the porter, "we don't want any light" (163). Through the men's refusal and confusion, the theme of visible, but unreachable light shapes how we read *Dubliners* because, paradoxically, we are informed by what is missing. In effect, this motif of the missing thing is the *gnomon*, the geometric shape that includes the space left when a piece is removed. However, only through the knowledge that the piece of the shape is gone can we even recognize it as a *gnomon*. In the same way that we identify a *gnomon* by its omitted corner, the instances of light in *Dubliners* do not provide clarity, but show how the characters' inability to express their own darkness or pain prevents them from both connecting with others, and from escaping their paralysis.

What is missing also becomes what is inexpressible in *Dubliners*. In "Grace" and "The Dead," Kernan, Gabriel, and Gretta are unable to communicate, either through a speech impediment when Kernan bites off a piece of his tongue, through Gabriel's fear of judgment, or through Gretta's inability to express her emotional pain. For Joshua Pederson, standard trauma theory explains such silences as a response to pain: "trauma is an experience so intensely painful that the mind is unable to process it normally. In the immediate aftermath, the victim may totally forget the event. And if memories of the trauma return, they are often non-verbal, and the victim may be unable to describe them with words" (334). Yet Pederson then modifies this definition, redefining trauma theory as "traumatic memories

[that] are both memorable and speakable. Hence, a new generation of trauma theorists should emphasize both the accessibility of traumatic memory and the possibility that victims may construct reliable narrative accounts of it. Accordingly, these theorists should shift their attention away from gaps and toward actual text” (338). Although Pederson’s argument attempts to modify and advance our understanding of trauma theory, he tends to discount trauma’s extreme nature, since by definition, trauma is an event so painful it is repressed, memories of which kind are impossibly hard to access and express.

Modifying Pederson, I argue that trauma is still largely inexpressible, and can only be alluded to obliquely, a reading which will be supported by the language of the characters of Kernan, Gabriel, and Gretta in *Dubliners*. I use the specific moments where characters are rendered silent through their partial or poor self-expression as indicative of the things they cannot discuss. I am not looking for what is entirely missing, only what the characters avoid expressing, consciously or not. Language gaps similar to those of Kernan, Gretta, and Gabriel are termed “experiential avoidance” by researchers Steven Hayes and Elizabeth Gifford, who conclude: “a trauma survivor may avoid thinking or talking about the trauma because the very process of contacting it verbally will bring some of the stimulus functions of the original experience to bear in the description” (171). Here, pain is what is missing in language, or it is the *gnomon* of language. If the silence of pain is a *gnomon*, then instead of adding to the confusion, the missing pieces of “Grace” and “The Dead” reveal the identities of Kernan, Gretta, and Gabriel, and situate them in the context of *Dubliners*, a work that resists the reader’s attempts for complete understanding.

Like many stories of *Dubliners*, “Grace” and “The Dead” portray characters caught in circles, whether of Kernan’s alcoholism, Gretta’s emotional trauma, or Gabriel’s lack of understanding. They begin differently, “Grace” with a failed attempt to “lift [Kernan] up” (117), and “The Dead” with “Lily...run off her feet” (135). While “Grace” moves upward, “The Dead” moves downward. Yet, both end with tones that are paradoxically redemptive and condemning. In “Grace,” Father Purdon’s exhortation to “rectify” the wrong, to “set right” your “accounts” both redeems and condemns, because while it is literally meant as the way to heaven, it also, in the final words, shows Kernan again silently

paralyzed by the economics of religion (134). For “The Dead,” it is the famous “snow...faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (168). While some of the Irish under the snow are identified as “the living,” some are equally “dead,” showing again both the juxtaposition of redemption and condemnation, in the gentle blanket that snow provides for things beneath the soil, and the kiss of death for the living above. The final connection between the two endings, however, is Gabriel’s corresponding lapse into silence, mirroring Kernan’s, when he is overwhelmed by his pain.

Silence is indicated as more important than language through the final muteness of the characters, from whom we formerly understood the prior stories, setting up Joyce’s *gnomon*. However, the *gnomon* is defined in two ways. First, it is the pointer on a sundial that casts the shadow to indicate the time. Second, and more important for my purposes here, it is, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram is taken away from one of its corners” (“gnomon”). The shape is an “L.” However, it is only possible to recognize the shape as a *gnomon* through the knowledge that the parallelogram is missing. Similarly, the missing pieces of “Grace” and “The Dead,” when identified, can help us understand the *gnomons* of the narratives through characters’ silence and subsequently blurred identities.

In “Grace,” Joyce first draws our attention to what is not being or cannot be said when Kernan bites off “a minute piece of [his] tongue” (119). The main character is then unable to speak clearly, the missing pieces of his words mirroring the *gnomon* as he misses hard or concrete consonants: ‘m’ (“meet”), ‘v’ (“very”), ‘b’ (“obliged”), ‘c’ (“can’t”), and ‘t’ (“tongue”) (119). Kernan’s words are each an individual *gnomon*, as each need the identification and placement of the missing consonant to be understood in the larger context of the sentence. If the man’s individual words are *gnomons*, then his sentences are much more so. Not once during the first scene in the bar does Kernan answer a question. When asked if he’s “all right,” he replies: “[it]’s nothing” (118). He later has the same response to “what’s the trouble” and simply refuses to reply to “where do you live” (118). The reply of “[it]’s nothing” has two meanings when used in conversation. In one sense it is literal: nothing has happened. In the other, however, it is an understatement: something has happened but the speaker is trying to minimize any acknowledgement of it. Despite the double meaning, in both senses the phrase is dismissive.

However, Kernan cannot actually be using the first sense, since something has happened, so he must instead be trying to hide the problem. Scott Klein pushes this reading further, asserting that “Kernan is not only unable to clarify what happened but is actively dismissive and obfuscating. He deliberately tries to minimize his injuries despite his real difficulty... [he] is unwilling to speak of the incident at any time” (115). The first event of the story, around which the narrative will settle, remains concealed, while repetition of Kernan’s response weds the phrases of “all right” and “the trouble.” While superficially it seems that Kernan is being deliberately obtuse, Klein misses Kernan’s legitimate attempt to answer the question he believes is being asked. When Cunningham questions Kernan during his convalescence, the invalid is helpful, if confused:

‘Who were you with?’ [...]  
 ‘A chap. I don’t know his name.... Little chap with sandy  
 hair...’  
 ‘And who else?’  
 ‘Harford.’ (123)

Although Kernan never explains what happened to him, he does try, indicating inability, rather than obstinacy. He also seems to view the two questions, of “what’s the trouble” and “where do you live,” one referential to him as a person, and the other to his events and surroundings, as the same (118). Not only do these phrases grammatically align, in that “the trouble” is “all right,” showing a passive acceptance of his circumstances, but the misunderstanding of the differences between a question of self and a question of surroundings also indicates a lack of understanding of identity, since Kernan seems to blur them together in his mind.

Kernan’s mental fuzziness is not only a product of his immediate experiences and current pain, but also of the alcohol he’s already consumed. He certainly wants more when he obliquely asks Power: “an’t we have a little...?” and later “express[es] his...regret...that they could not have a little drink together” (119). Even then, Kernan does not address his own real desire: he wants “a little.” Joyce also makes sure to reference only Kernan’s words to the “young man,” so that again, nothing of importance is actually spoken. But even if Kernan affects part of his confusion so as to not have

to explain, part of it is real. When he initially revives from the brandy, he “look[s] about him[self]... and then, understand[s]” (118). He must be drunk, because “shock and...incipient pain...partly... sober...him” (119). The alcohol then functions as another curtain that prevents our understanding. Because Kernan is drunk, he awakens without “understanding,” preventing him from relating his circumstances, even if he hadn’t bitten off part of his tongue (118). Both alcohol and injury prevent Kernan from identifying himself (“where do you live”), and explaining “what...the trouble” is (118). The two things that are most important in the beginning of any story—what is going on, and to whom it is happening, are not told. Any information given is ambiguous at best. Kernan occupies the former role of the narrator in establishing the story’s immediate *gnomon*, as critic Jean Kane argues: “Kernan, like the narrator, employs...ambiguous term[s].... The incident is ‘nothing,’ and if it must be named, it is ‘a little accident.’... The drunken man has forfeited the ability, and the right, to ‘speak’ himself.... The first scene of ‘Grace’ acts as a rehearsal for the rest of the story.... The Dubliners speak by biting their tongues” (196-197). However, even without the handicap of the bitten tongue or influence of alcohol, Kernan still “wished the details of the incident to remain vague” (124). Whatever has happened, the crux around which the rest of the narrative orbits, Kernan cannot even *want* to express it. Within the first two pages of “Grace,” Kernan, and even the crowd in the bar, who did not “kn[o]w who he was,” or what has happened to him, are unable to articulate either Kernan’s identity, or the pain behind his circumstances (117). Their inarticulate ignorance is the *gnomon*, the inexpressible.

Specifically, the omnipresent inexpressible in “Grace” is pain. In order, the questions that Mr. Kernan is unable to answer, or answers vaguely, are: “You’re all right now?”, “Where do you live?”, “What’s the trouble?”, “Can you walk?” (118), “How did you get yourself into this mess?”, “how the accident had happened” (119), “it doesn’t pain you now?” (122), and “who were you with?” (123). All require Kernan’s explanation of the events, and therefore his pain and humiliation. If “where do you live” seems to break the mold, Mrs. Kernan, upon her first introduction, realigns the question with the others, saying, “We were waiting for him to come home with the money. He never seems to think he has a home at all” (120-121). This reluctance to return home, instead moving between points in Dublin, essentially going nowhere, must have some basis. While Mrs. Kernan’s statement makes sense,



it strangely emphasizes Kernan's alcoholism or spending problems, instead of his unwillingness to go home, or more specifically, his not "think[ing that] he has a home." When home is the subject, and is naturally paired with unanswerable questions, the idea "home" is made synonymous with pain, the inhibitor of the other questions. Klein also points out that pain, and therefore violence, is emphasized by Joyce because "'Grace' stands alone in *Dubliners*...in having violent action as its initial impetus rather than its climatic result...Kernan's injury is the only instance of physical harm in Joyce other than that at the climax of 'Circe' in *Ulysses*, a scene that is virtually a repetition of the opening of 'Grace'" (117). However, although pain is pivotal, as seen in Kernan's unanswered questions, it renders characters silent.

In "The Dead," neither Gabriel nor Gretta can successfully express themselves, and instead remain silent. Gabriel was "undecided" about and "feared" for "his speech," believing that "the lines from Robert Browning...would be above the heads" of the party guests, and that "he would only make himself ridiculous" (138). Gabriel even concludes: "his whole speech was a mistake from the first to last, an utter failure" (138). "Speech" does not solely refer to his intended dinner oration, however, since Gabriel's lapse into self-condemnation immediately follows his memory of his previous awkward conversation with Lily. For Gabriel, "speech" in general is "an utter failure." Later, it is "the failure of his irony" that prevents dialogue with Gretta (165). Speech does not only fail for Gabriel, however, as Terence Murphy observes: "the famous passage in which Gabriel fails to recognize his own wife on the stairs is almost immediately echoed in the words of Aunt Julia during the long series of goodbyes before Gabriel and Gretta set off for the hotel" (595). As one goodbye suggests, "—O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you" (160). Gretta is invisible to the others, showing that it is impossible for any of the characters to even identify each other through words, let alone express more difficult things. When Gabriel errs while talking to Lily, he tries to fix his mistake by taking "a coin rapidly from his pocket. 'O Lily,' he said, thrusting it into her hands, 'it's Christmas-time, isn't it? Just...here's a little...'" (137). The coin moves from being hidden in Gabriel's pocket to being hidden or protected in Lily's hands. It is a secret thing, kept between the two of them, while functioning as payment, a public thing. Although at a basic level the scene presents an economic transaction, Gabriel pays her in penance for his mistake,

adding religious notes. During his apology, he stammers: “just...here’s a little...” never actually saying anything substantive. Gabriel’s words fail while offering amends for his failure of speech, leaving him caught in a cycle of silence.

Murphy uses the concept of co-reference choices, or chains, as “formed from out of that set of conceptually coherent choices by which the narrator establishes reference to a particular literary character,” to understand the characters’ secrets: “[a] co-reference choice enacts local patterns of character defamiliarization...the co-reference choices to the pivotal character are particularly marked; these patterns set apart that character whose function it is to send the main character on a journey of inward discovery” (Murphy 581-82). Yet his application of this theory to *Dubliners*, and to “The Dead” in particular, does not adequately account for the end of the story. Gabriel ultimately does not move, but remains in a state of incomprehension, especially of his wife. Although he perhaps embarks on the “journey of inward discovery,” he turns back before actually discovering anything.

The ending of “The Dead” is characterized by the failure of language of both Gabriel and Gretta, when they talk past each other without understanding, and re-presents the *gnomon*. First, Gabriel misidentifies Michael Furey repeatedly as “someone [Gretta] w[as] in love with,” a “delicate boy,” someone she is still “in love with,” her reason for “want[ing] to go to Galway,” and a person “she had been comparing him...with” (165). Gabriel focuses on what Gretta’s words could be indicating, rather than what she actually says. The inverse of this oblique conversation is Gretta’s inability to adequately express her pain at the death of Michael Furey. Her explanation ceases: “O, the day I heard that, that he was dead” (167). Joyce does not write ellipsis marks, or indicate at all that Gretta would have continued her sentence if she had not “flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt” (167). Gretta’s ability to speak ends where the trauma of Furey’s death begins. Again, we see that Gabriel’s life-changing anecdote is unfinished, and is unable to ever be, as the silence is more telling than any words, revealing Joyce’s *gnomon* of speech as a pivot for his characters’ incapacity to understand or express both their own suffering and the resulting vagueness of identity.

Like Mr. Kernan’s experiences in “Grace,” Gabriel’s night is unforgettable and shaped by his pain. Although Gretta’s revelations actually traumatize her husband, his suffering begins even before the

meal at their aunts, as shown in Gerard Quinn's argument highlighting the similarities between "The Dead" and The Last Supper: "it is clear that a meal is important in Joyce's story, and when the meal is over, the leading character, Gabriel Conroy, goes through a process not of physical suffering or death but certainly of mortification.... If Joyce is alluding to Tenebrae, which dramatizes Christ's imminent passion, he has found an elegant way of commenting on the pain of the night that Gabriel Conroy has ahead of him" (154). Quinn's analogies work, meaning that Joyce created Gabriel's character to be one trapped in pain. He suffers in a way that is almost laughable, until you recognize that, like the other characters, he is unable to express those feelings. Although Kernan experiences physical pain, and Gabriel feels emotional pain, both men experience humiliation. For Kernan it is in his public sprawl into the filthy bar floor, and for Gabriel it is the thought that his wife might not love him as much as a dead boy.

In spite of the differences in the pain felt by Gretta, Gabriel, and Kernan, all three are rendered silent. Although alcohol contributes to their inexpression, ultimately none of the characters are prevented from expressing their pain by an outside source. Instead, each is caught up in their memories. Like Kernan's terrible physical and mental experiences, Gabriel's emotional pain and Gretta's emotional and mental trauma prevent their speech. Their experiences therefore imprison their identities in the silences, which are expressions of Joyce's *gnomon*, showing us the parts of their identities that the characters are unable to express. Consequently, Kernan's, Gabriel's, and Gretta's identities themselves are the Joycean parallelograms that can be recognized through their *gnomons*. To be specific, Kernan's character is left as the victim of a fall, an alcoholic, while the reason for his fall and presence in the bar to begin with remain concealed, hiding the identity he had kept secret, and leaving us only with his public one. Gabriel, the literature professor, simply cannot speak, and although the narration follows him, it consistently hides his identity because of his fear of rejection. Gretta can articulate her feelings better than her husband; however, her adolescent emotional trauma prevents her from accessing the words necessary to describe it, locking that piece of her identity away as well. Each of the secret identities hidden by pain are the missing corners of the *gnomons* of individual characters, in addition to forming a larger *gnomon* of either "Grace" or "The Dead," or even of *Dubliners* as a whole. If seen,

they would complete the parallelogram, but if recognized, they would allow for the understanding of its nature and existence. Through the lens of Joyce's *gnomon*, we have greater access to unlocking the missing pieces, because we now know where to look.

In the context of Bloody Sunday, the traumatic 1972 event that impressed itself on Irish national understanding, the importance of what is missing makes sense. If trauma itself is almost inexpressible, then writing meaning in characters' silences would not only resonate with the Irish, but provide a method of understanding and accessing painful memories. While discussing *Bloody Sunday* (2002), a drama-documentary, Aileen Blaney writes: "[because of] the regeneration of historical consciousness...a number of...organizations have undertaken [to] address...the traumas of the previous quarter century of violence...educating the larger public... [on how] their suffering motivates their activities" (116). Victims are only now speaking, after 30 years, illustrating just how hard the expression of pain truly is. If trauma is found in the inexpressible, then James Joyce situates *Dubliners* in this narrative, beginning Irish literature's attempt to understand pain, 50 years before the Irish people would need to do so during "The Troubles," but immediately relevant to the imminent suffering of World War I, giving us the *gnomon's* sliver of light from a window, through which we can distinguish the darkness.

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### The Game Debate: Video Games as Innovative Storytelling

Video games are a popular source of entertainment for people of all ages, and both scholars and fans debate whether or not they can go beyond simply being games to become a legitimate medium of literature. Just as a book, depending on the genre, can present a wide variety of information, a game developer can include platform levels (*Super Mario Bros.*), puzzles (*Tetris*), fighting (*Street Fighter*), or narratives (*Final Fantasy*). The stories in games are found textually in dialogue, speech, or prose, or within cinematic narratives called cutscenes (Domsch 31). These storytelling sections generally alternate with gameplay segments, and depending on the writer's intent, one may be more prominent than the other; a game more focused on playing may spend little time on exposition, while one with a storytelling goal may have non-interactive events unfold for fifteen minutes at a time. This may seem obvious for some, but for many unfamiliar with the gaming realm, the fact that narrative games exist can sound astonishing. The question then becomes whether or not video games offer the literary world something new and legitimate to work with. I argue that they do and therefore should not be overlooked and viewed simply as juvenile, mindless entertainment.

Between the constant, rapid advance of technology and the evolution of the philosophy of art, new storytelling mediums such as cameras for cinema and computers for animation have developed over the past few centuries; however, such innovative modes of expression were not immediately regarded as worthy to the critical eye, and it was not until art criticism itself developed that new forms were accepted as legitimate literary vehicles. This journey to open-armed reception is in order for video games as well. Due to their consistent media-and-user interactivity and the inclusion of player agency, video games offer to storytelling enhanced narrative characteristics as well as new, unique ones. These strengthened qualities consist of the suspension of disbelief and emotional immersion concepts, while the innovative ones are the Future Narrative genre—which allows players to experience different

possible story endings—and the potential narrative twists the physical medium can offer.

Although scholars have assessed storytelling and video games, few in-depth analyses of specific games exist to support their contentions about narrative's importance in the game medium; therefore, in arguing my thesis, I will utilize scholars' broad investigations to analyze Kotaro Uchikoshi's narrative-based *Zero Escape* series. Its first two volumes, *9 Hours, 9 Persons, 9 Doors* (abbreviated *999*) and *Virtue's Last Reward*, focus on storytelling with the predominant gameplay relying solely on nodal—or “fork in the road”—structure; therefore, the series serves as a perfect model for games' innovative characteristics. While its recently released third volume, *Zero Time Dilemma*, also has these qualities, I will concentrate on *999* and *Virtue's Last Reward*.

Before delving into the innovative storytelling qualities of video games, it is crucial to first establish the distinction between traditional narrative mediums and video games. While “gameplay” is the obvious difference, it is still important to define formally what a video game is within the spectrum of media in terms of its activity or passivity. Sebastian Domsch accomplishes this quite well in his book *Storytelling: Agency and Narrative in Video Games*, categorizing media in terms of its relationship between the creator and the audience and whether or not the medium is nodal (7). He borrows the term from Bode and Dietrich's text *Future Narratives*, which states, “A node is a situation that allows for more than one continuation” (vii). In terms of media, a vehicle that is actively nodal allows the audience to make choices that alter the outcome, while one that is passive prohibits outside interference in its rules. Crossing these two categories are those of “static” and “dynamic,” with the former depending on the user for temporality and movement (books and paintings require an active viewer to “work”), and the latter being entirely independent (movies and music can play without an active listener) (Domsch 7). By bringing in nodes, the static category claims tabletop games and choose-your-own-adventure books, and the dynamic category has video games. For while video games require an active user to fulfill their full potential of gameplay, they still include dynamic elements such as artificial intelligence (AI), which allows for non-playable characters (NPCs) to move and act independently from the player. Thus, video games can be categorized as dynamic, actively nodal media. This label implies games have a special relationship between the agent and user—or game and player—that gives the latter much more agency



than any other form of media can offer. Within the parameters of prescribed programming or rules, players can make decisions in nodal situations in order to pursue whichever path they desire.

This nodal agency generates the interactivity of video games. Depending on the game's genre, choice is offered to players in a variety of ways. Generally the most frequently used engine is what one would find in action or adventure games, in which players can fight, explore, and speak to NPCs; however, nodes appear in other forms as well. Similar to a choose-your-own-adventure book, decisions for the action or dialogue of the playable character are offered to players. These nodes can be found primarily in visual novels, which are interactive fiction games consisting of mostly narration and some interactive elements. Because *Zero Escape* is categorized as one of these visual novels, its interactivity resides in dialogue as well as puzzles. Throughout the game, long prose segments with character dialogue and plot developments are presented. These segments alternate with puzzle portions in which players must use meticulous problem-solving to escape from rooms and progress through the story. During both of these sections, players are intermittently given dialogue choices for the protagonist—Junpei in *999* and Sigma in *Virtue's Last Reward*. It is with this interactivity that *Zero Escape* and video games as a whole either enhance or offer the four aforementioned opportunities for storytelling: a stronger suspension of disbelief, emotional immersion, the Future Narrative, and narrative reversal.

The suspension of disbelief is a concept all fictive narratives strive to accomplish. The phrase was coined by Romantic-era poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, and although he deploys it with regard to his and William Wordsworth's poetry, today it is applied to fiction in general. This is a simple task to accomplish for tales taking place in the 'real' world, but for ones of the fantasy or science fiction genres, authors must use more effort in order to stay consistent. Despite the events in a story being impossible in *our* world, within the context and natural laws of the plot's setting, they must at least be probable and believable. *Zero Escape* accomplishes this credibility quite well. The surface story of both games is that nine seemingly random people are kidnapped, placed in a boat (*999*) or warehouse (*Virtue's Last Reward*), and forced to play the "Nonary Game," a game requiring players to seek a way out of rooms with puzzles in order to escape. Neither game reveals the facilities' exteriors until the end, but players quickly learn both take place in a parallel, fictional version

of the real world through historical or geographical details.

This grounding becomes useful as the games later introduce science fiction concepts such as time travel and telepathy. The basis for these outlandish ideas stems from two actual theories about reality: morphic resonance and the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics, which I will break down as simply as possible. Morphic resonance is a concept experimented with and explored by biochemist Rupert Sheldrake, who proposes that what is essentially a telepathy-like collective unconsciousness links the natural universe through morphogenetic fields. Unconsciously, organisms constantly inherit memories, which can then be used to explain epiphanies, or moments in which one just simply “knows” something despite never having experienced it. For example, Harvard University’s William McDougall had rats escape from a tank, and each generation of rats made fewer and fewer mistakes in the process. When scientists in Australia tried duplicating the experiment, their rats made fewer mistakes from the start. Presumably, the collective unconsciousness of Sheldrake’s morphic resonance was at work here, and the rats in Australia “inherited” the memories of those at Harvard (“More on Morphogenetic Fields”). *Zero Escape* takes this concept several steps further by connecting it to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics. The quantum theory states that every nodal situation branches off into other paths of events which then split into more possible paths of events, and that all these extensions exist simultaneously. Essentially, an infinite number of parallel timelines or worlds exist (as opposed to a time loop, in which only one infinitely *repeating* timeline exists). *Zero Escape* then proposes that, by manipulating the morphogenetic field, morphic resonance can be used as a means of time travel. Rather than physically transporting bodies, however, the game suggests human consciousnesses can be transported over time. As an example, someone could “send” his or her memory into a past nodal situation, teach himself or herself to “choose” differently at that node, and thus create a new branch, timeline, or possible future.

Explaining this concept outside of its context is convoluted, but when playing the game, it is presented in such a way that not only suspends disbelief but also creates legitimate belief. Because of how seamlessly the real-life, scientific, and story aspects blend together, the idea becomes extremely convincing for players such as myself. This concept being an actual possible means of time travel

is probably not likely, but during and immediately after playing the game, it almost feels probable. Although the story introduces radical concepts such as time travel and telepathy into what clearly begins as a realistic setting, the game grounds them in real-life scientific theories in order to ward off player skepticism. Just as with traditional storytelling, game narratives also strive for the suspension of disbelief.

Alongside utilizing the same literary strategies as traditional storytelling, video games can also create a suspension of disbelief through the concept of the avatar. Avatars are the characters that users play as, and depending on the genre, they can come in one of two forms: wet clay to be shaped by the player or a pre-made statue. As scholars Sabine Trepte and Leonard Reinecke explain the former, “In *The Sims 2*, players are not only able to change their avatar’s appearance, but also personality traits. Especially in [Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games] (e.g., *World of Warcraft*, *Eve Online*), users are able to choose from a variety of features in order to manipulate the appearance, character, skills, and in some games even the ancestry of their avatars” (171). Players can make these characters appear however they want, whether as a reflection or idealized version of themselves or simply whatever they find aesthetically pleasing or ‘cool.’ This is a feature that is unique to video games; however, the “pre-made statue” characters are essentially what one would encounter in any other traditional narrative medium. What becomes innovative is the fact that players control these characters, making the player figuratively become the main character. This duality is exemplified by how people typically speak of their game playing: “I found this item” or “This enemy attacked *me*.” While the character is obviously not literally the player, it is still the embodiment of the player within the realm of the game and thus the medium through which the player participates in nodal situations. The fact that players themselves actively step into the shoes and take the role of avatars helps break down the wall between the story and real life.

This concept of the game avatar then lends itself to emotional immersion, which, due to their interactive qualities, games accomplish in a manner greater than traditional storytelling media can. Scholars writing on the topic often stress the importance of this advantage. With exponential advances in technology in recent years, these qualities have only grown with nodes, realism, and even physical

immersion through movement or voice, thus creating an atmosphere players can potentially relate to and thus sympathize with (Tavinor 26-27). A generally “good” quality of art or literature is the ability to evoke emotion, and video games present an innovative way to achieve that goal (Adams 72). As an example, Aaron Smuts claims that by giving players the responsibility of decision, popular war-themed games such as *Metal Gear Solid* can better convey the themes of their narratives. Another scholar, Ernest Adams, makes a similar point about the powerful experience of war games in particular, noting that he felt the “immediate and visceral experience of the challenge” faced by the Soviets in a World War II game played from the Russian perspective (72). Grant Tavinor discusses this emotional phenomenon from a psychological level. He asserts, “Emotion and action are close cognitive bedfellows. This should lead us to suspect that the role of emotion in interactive fictions will be distinctive... The nature of videogames as interactive fictions determines the type of emotional responses we have toward them” (Tavinor 36). Tavinor cites the prevalent emotions as being frustration, anger, fear, and elation these all can easily be attributed to the dynamic and sometimes even demanding aspects of gameplay. While books can elicit similar empathetic reactions, the literal interactivity of video games facilitates and strengthens them.

*Zero Escape* takes advantage of the game medium to give its players a similar emotionally immersive experience. Alongside puzzles, the series thrives on nodes in the form of dialogue choices, which then have a direct impact on outcomes. Several are minor nodal situations that do not alter anything in the story besides a character’s reaction, so they have little emotional effect. There are, however, other instances in which a decision can completely alter the plot direction, and this places a lot of responsibility on players. In both *Zero Escape* games, players are periodically given the choice of which doors to go through, and they then witness the scenario of the one they chose. Whatever events occur behind other doors go unseen; in some cases, this has a drastic effect on the game’s outcome. For example, in *999*, if players do not go into the door containing a special bookmark, they will not be able to have Junpei give it to Clover later on. Giving the bookmark to Clover initiates a conversation that ultimately makes her realize her brother is alive and has not actually been murdered by one of the other characters, as previously believed. If the player does not have the bookmark, then depending on

other choices made, Clover vengefully kills everyone. When I experienced the game as a player, knowing my own choices led to this tragic ending made the result more horrifying than if I had been passively reading the story. This added a lot of weight and stress onto each decision I made in subsequent playthroughs, and I thereafter constantly questioned myself at each node.

*Virtue's Last Reward* establishes the emotional weight of each nodal situation in the game immediately. While it has both benign dialogue decisions and potentially dangerous ones like 999, *Virtue's Last Reward* also applies game theory in some nodes that imposes stress onto players, making them question the morals of their decisions as well as the trustworthiness of other characters. As defined by *Merriam-Webster*, game theory is “the analysis of a situation involving conflicting interests (as in business or military strategy) in terms of gains and losses among opposing players.” An example of game theory is the Prisoner’s Dilemma, wherein two crime partners—A and B—are imprisoned, placed in separate cells, and offered an opportunity to confess. If A and B both stay silent, they are both imprisoned for two years. If A confesses while B stays silent, A is imprisoned for one year, while B is imprisoned for fifteen. If both confess, they are both imprisoned for ten years. *Virtue's Last Reward* utilizes the same “ally or betray” situation, but it uses different numbers, dubs it the “AB Game,” and also heavily increases the stakes. The characters have digital watches displaying numbers (a parallel to the prisoners’ years), and throughout the game, they must participate in several AB Games. If a character accumulates nine points, he or she can escape from the facility the group is being held in; however, there are two catches: 1) if a character reaches or falls below zero points, he or she dies; 2) the escape route can only be used once and will then be closed forever. With such drawbacks, the characters become wary of one another, especially since they all have only just met. This feeling of distrust reaches the player as well, and with each AB Game decision, he or she knows lives are on the line. It is incredibly intimidating and stressful, especially as players eventually must betray or be betrayed by characters they grow fond of. Characters often react emotionally to being betrayed as well, such as Phi, who disdainfully says to the protagonist, “When someone betrays your trust, it feels like a part of you dies. For me I guess it was the part that cared” (*Virtue's Last Reward*). When I heard it, the line packed a powerful emotional punch as I realized the character I respected most had then lost all respect for me. Because players are

making these decisions themselves in these games, the emotional reaction becomes much greater than when experiencing more passive media like books or film.

In addition to enhancing preexisting storytelling concepts, video games also introduce new ones, such as a promising medium for Future Narratives. As discussed by Bode and Dietrich, Future Narratives make several possible outcomes available, whereas traditional Past Narratives only have one, which cannot be interfered with by users. Recalling its definition, a node is a junction leading to multiple pathways. If at least one is present in a narrative, “then we call it a ‘Future Narrative’ (FN), in contradistinction to narratives that have ‘only’ events—they are ‘Past Narratives’ (PN)” (Bode & Dietrich vii). As Domsch argues, “As conveyors of narrative, video games constantly negotiate between the openness necessary for agency and narrative demands for some form of closure. The range between these two poles is where they are to be understood as FNs” (5). As argued earlier, few forms of media can successfully give users the option to choose paths in a given situation, but the interactivity of video games allows it. Rather than simply theorizing multiple possible timelines of the narrative, they can actually stage those futures. This is the essence of the Future Narrative. Bode and Dietrich claim that “by virtue of operating with nodes, [Future Narratives] are able to preserve essential features of future time, viz. openness, indeterminacy, potentiality, the possibility of multiple continuations, and so on and so forth” (74).

Because of its heavy use of influential nodes, *Zero Escape* is perhaps the perfect example of the Future Narrative model. Not only do the games include nodal situations, but the story also acknowledges them within the context of the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics. As explained earlier, the many-worlds theory suggests that every event in time is a fork in the road to other paths of events, and all these timeline extensions exist parallel to one another. In *Virtue’s Last Reward*, Phi hypothesizes why the characters are being forced to play the Nonary Game, which is ultimately to prevent a world-ending pandemic by using the morphogenetic field to send information to the past and create a new timeline branch free of the disease. First, however, she explains the many-worlds concept by telling Sigma to make any kind of movement. The player is given several different options, ranging from crossing his arms, clapping, moonwalking, and more. Assuming the player chooses arm-crossing,

Phi summarizes:

You crossed your arms just now, right? But you could have chosen to put your hands on your hips, or clap. Now maybe there are other Sigmas, in other worlds, who did all of those things. All of these worlds and realities are branching off from one another. The choices you could have made branched off from the moment you decided what you were going to do just now. (*Virtue's Last Reward*)

Coincidentally, if a player desires to do so, he or she may go back, replay the scene, and choose a different movement option, thereby making another possible branch, or “future.” This is precisely what a Future Narrative is, albeit one consonant with quantum mechanics. In terms of *Zero Escape*, 999 has six possible endings, while *Virtue's Last Reward* has twenty. In order to complete the games and unlock all their narrative segments and mysteries, players must go through every ending. Each of these endings is a possible future to be explored by the player depending on decisions made while playing, which is precisely what a Future Narrative is by Bode and Dietrich's definition.

There are, however, two problems that arise with regard to this openness of Future Narratives. The first is that the methods through which narrative is presented in video games—dialogue and exposition in *Zero Escape*—heighten the divide between narrative and gameplay. As Domsch explains, “All passive narrative forms are in themselves experienced as passive and therefore identical to the media from which they are appropriated (film, text, audio), but they can, and usually are, contextualized in an actively nodal way, since they are forms in an actively nodal structure” (31). The other issue is that, due to technological limitations, these futures are fully preprogrammed and prewritten by authors, scriptwriters, and game designers, so there is no true indeterminacy as with a Future Narrative; the futures already exist within the programming before they are realized or experienced by players (Bode & Dietrich 50). Within the boundaries of current technology, it is impossible to achieve that level of infinite randomness; however, with advances, perhaps these obstacles could be overcome, allowing for complete agency for players and indeterminacy for the narrative—just like real life. Video games such as *Zero Escape* in particular serve as a foundational start to this innovative genre of storytelling. In fact,

such steps are already being taken by game developers toward story-relevant indeterminacy, as exhibited in *Zero Escape's* recent third installment, *Zero Time Dilemma*. At certain nodes throughout the game, a “random” factor has been incorporated into the story. For example, the context of one decision is a case of Russian roulette. Through the character Diana, the player has the option to either shoot or not shoot Sigma. If he or she chooses to shoot, whether or not a bullet actually emerges is entirely arbitrary, based on a random number generator (RNG) algorithms, and each possible action has its own unique outcome. While this is not yet pure indeterminacy, it is still a step in that direction.

The other innovative storytelling characteristic of video games lies in the physical state of the medium. As previously mentioned, advances in technology have already brought about interesting ways to get involved in games beyond simply holding a controller and moving one's fingers. Controllers might be motion sensitive for driving or fighting simulations, allowing players to utilize the remotes in a fashion similar to real life. Xbox 360 Kinect games allow players' movements to be recognized in dancing games. Nintendo 3DS AR cards use the console's camera to “add” interactive figures such as dragons onto real-life surfaces. These are all opportunities traditional media does not offer, and although they have not yet been utilized as ways to add unique twists to narratives, they definitely have the potential to.

*Zero Escape* is one of the few video game series that takes full advantage of the medium for storytelling in this way, particularly in *999*. The game resides on the Nintendo DS console, which has the unique feature of having two screens—one on the top and one on the bottom. An iOS version of the game exists as well, but it splits the iPhone screen in half to achieve the same effect. Typically this feature is used by having one screen display a menu or map, while the other is where the action takes place, such as in *Pokémon* games. Perhaps because it is a visual novel, *999* uses the function differently, which ultimately ends up creating a plot twist that could never be accomplished so well in traditional storytelling media. Throughout the game, the bottom screen is used for third-person narration as well as the puzzle segments; meanwhile, the top screen is where the dialogue takes place. Because the protagonist is Junpei, the player makes decisions as Junpei, the narration looks into Junpei's mind, and the player interacts with puzzles on the bottom screen. There is no doubt that



the literary perspective of the game is third-person and omniscient to Junpei. This is how the game is witnessed by the player for at least twenty hours of gameplay.

As the surface of the game's plot is dismantled, however, the perspective begins to change to first-person, but still omniscient to Junpei. As it turns out, the true reason the nine characters are kidnapped is to save a young girl, Akane, from the past. Years prior to the game's events, the first Nonary Game takes place, in which several children are kidnapped for a scientific experiment regarding morphogenetic fields. Half of them are placed on a boat, and the other half are put in a building in Nevada. The groups are determined based on the children's relationship to one another, and if they are close like a brother and sister, they are separated. Theoretically, because of their strong emotional bonds to one another, the siblings' morphic resonance is stronger than normal, allowing them to communicate telepathically with one another in order to solve puzzles and escape from the facilities. A mistake is made, however, and Akane is placed in the same location as her brother, therefore hindering their attempt to escape because he cannot "send" her outside information about the puzzles from the opposite location. This becomes life-threatening as Akane eventually finds herself locked in an initiated incinerator and unable to solve the escape puzzle. Because Akane is a dear childhood friend of Junpei, the game's current events—the second Nonary Game—exist as an attempt to access the morphogenetic fields across time and help her solve the puzzle in order to save her. As this plot twist is exposed to players, another one appears as the bottom screen's third-person narration suddenly switches to first-person. At this point, the narration reads:

[I] was watching. I had watched everything that was reflected in his eyes.  
 I was listening. Every sound that vibrated in his eardrums, I heard. Smell,  
 taste, touch... I felt everything he felt. I knew. I knew everything about  
 him. What he was thinking, what he was feeling, what he was sensing...  
 All of his feelings and worries and fears became mine... My mind, my  
 consciousness, was inside of him. Through the morphic fieldset we were  
 resonant, and we were as one. I was him, and at the same time, I was an  
 observer. (*9 Hours, 9 Persons, 9 Doors*)

This shift in point-of-view reveals that the entire “third-person” narration of the game is actually coming from the eyes of the young Akane of the past. The perspective change is emphasized in two ways: 1) with the first “I” being surrounded by actual in-text brackets, which are used throughout the game when new characters or concepts are revealed, and 2) when it eventually becomes time to solve the incinerator’s puzzle, and that puzzle—a Sudoku spread—is displayed upside-down in correlation to the illustration of Akane in the top screen, therefore equating the player’s gameplay to her actions.

The plot reversal is especially astonishing in hindsight to players, as they may realize that since the young Akane has been witnessing the events of the game unfold, she has been watching all the horrors take place as well. This is particularly relevant in terms of some peculiar imagery and description choices used in the beginning of the game. In the early events, one of the characters breaks the rules of the Nonary Game and is killed for it through the detonation of an ingested bomb. Snake’s dead body is later discovered briefly in a similar situation, during which the “third-person” narration reads, “The blood coating almost made it look like raw pizza dough covered in tomato sauce” (*9 Hours, 9 Persons, 9 Doors*). When Junpei ultimately inspects Snake’s mutilated corpse, the narration continues:

Chunks of flesh, torn from the body, sat in the blood like tiny islands in a great, red sea. A vast, ragged hole had been torn in the torso, and what remained of his intestines spilled out of it like fresh spaghetti. Smaller chunks of meat had splattered against the wall, and become stuck there as they dried. (*9 Persons, 9 Hours, 9 Doors*)

The gore is reported in comparison to food, which is rather disturbing on its own already; however, once the player finds out that the twelve-year-old Akane is narrating the story, it becomes even more horrific and brings in some heavy themes of the loss of innocence on her part. While a simple point-of-view reversal such as this could be accomplished in traditional media like novels as well, its flabbergasting effect would not be nearly as powerful as in a video game like *Zero Escape* due to how immersive it becomes and the fact that the player exists in the game through the avatar.

Because of their unique interactive qualities and use of nodes, video games have much to offer to the literary realm, whether through enhanced traditional storytelling techniques or new, innovative

ones. Their immersive characteristics help strengthen the suspension of disbelief and emotional immersion as well as offer new opportunities like the Future Narrative and medium-based plot reversals. Perhaps the next step in recognizing video games' innovation for storytelling rests in the hands of game developers and critics alike. Developers should produce and advertise more games with the aim of narrative in mind, and critics who are well-versed in the literary field must analyze what already exists and what may exist in the future. By embracing games' innovative qualities, we can transcend traditional narrative boundaries and create truly ultimate storytelling experiences. 🌿

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Submit each manuscript as a separate email attachment in Microsoft Word. TOR discourages simultaneous submission to other journals.

All text should be provided in current MLA format, justified left only and without headers and footers.

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