





# Thirty-Three [33]

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# STAFF ROLES

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Dat Tran

## COLLEGE EDUCATION IS EVOLVING: ALL I NEED IS A COMPUTER WITH INTERNET ACCESS

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For many years, the influence of technology on education has been a controversial topic, especially at the college level. Our goal is to make college education available and affordable to everyone, and technology has been helping us to achieve that goal. We are now able to make traditional education more accessible to all, while creating new forms of educational environments. Online education is one of the new forms that has been created recently. More and more colleges are offering free online courses to their students, making it more convenient and cheaper than ever to get a college degree. Many people are excited about this invention. There is still, however, some skepticism regarding the effectiveness of these online courses. Although students are provided with more enjoyable, convenient ways of obtaining knowledge, online classes lack some great values that traditional courses offer. In order for online classes to become the future of education, we—those who are interested in college education—need to find the answer to the question: How can we eliminate the weaknesses of online education and maximize its strengths?

[7]

As a student who had to take half of his high school courses online, I know how these online classes differ from traditional ones. My high school did not offer Calculus, Physics, American History, and other courses I required, so I had to take these courses online. My experience was not always enjoyable. Although I really enjoyed the discussions and the videos posted by the instructors, I still wish I could have taken those classes in a traditional way. There was always something confusing about the lectures, especially in Physics and Calculus, and the instructors couldn't answer my questions directly. When I emailed my instructors, it usually took them many weeks to respond. In addition, students could only see the instructors through the videos he or she posted, and we never had a chance to get to know them. This lack of intimacy between the instructors and students really made me dislike online courses. Unlike online teachers, my teachers in traditional courses truly cared about their students. They were available for any questions or concerns students might have had, and also tried to learn about each of their students. My high school teachers actually knew all about my strengths, my weaknesses, and my ambitions, so I always felt supported. My experience led me to the conclusion that although online classes were informative and convenient, they would never be as great as traditional, face-to-face classrooms. Mark Edmundson, an English professor at the University of Virginia, seems to agree.

He defines what a good educational experience is in his article, “The Trouble with Online Education,” published in *The New York Times*. Edmundson particularly values the interaction between students and the instructor and writes,

“I think that the best of those lecturers are highly adept at reading their audiences. They use practical means to do this—tests and quizzes, papers and evaluations. But they also deploy something tantamount to artistry. They are superb at sensing the mood of a room.” (para. 8)

According to Edmundson, a good instructor must ensure his students are engaged in the lecture. He does this by interacting with his students. He must be able to make the discussions more interesting and informative for every student. The interaction between an instructor and his students is crucial because it helps the instructor identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of his students. This understanding of his students helps the instructor adjust the syllabus and presentations in a way that gives him more time to address all his students’ questions and concerns.

[8] Online courses, according to Edmundson, lack this interaction and understanding between students and teachers. As Edmundson describes in his article, online education is a controversial topic at the University of Virginia. His college and many others are cooperating with Coursera, an organization founded by Stanford University, to offer free online courses. Edmundson affirms these online courses can never offer as valuable an experience as traditional courses. In Edmundson’s view,

“online education is a one-size-fits-all endeavor. It tends to be a monologue and not a real dialogue. The Internet teacher, even one who responds to students via e-mail, can never have the immediacy of contact that the teacher on the scene can, with his sensitivity to unspoken moods and enthusiasms.” (para. 10)

In other words, Edmundson believes online courses are designed for everyone. The instructor is unable to learn about every single student in his course because he doesn’t see them in person. The course’s syllabus, therefore, remains unchanged throughout the course. A student who struggles to understand some parts of the online lecture will likely fail the course because he or she never has a chance to figure it out with his instructor. Edmundson concludes that online courses, despite being great sources of knowledge for motivated students, can never create the “intellectual joy” (para. 12) a traditional course does.

Having the same views as Edmundson about online education, Carolyn Lawes, a history professor at Old Dominion University, describes the



challenges she faces as she moves from traditional, face-to-face teaching, to online teaching in her article "Talking Less But Saying More: Teaching U.S. History Online." She agrees that the biggest challenge of online classes is the lack of interaction between instructors and students. Lawes writes, "I do not witness them, and that, for me, is a great loss. Nor do I have the opportunity to hang out and chat with students before or after class, to get to know them as individuals" (1213). According to Lawes, the interaction with her students that arises from conversations is what she misses most about traditional classrooms. As Lawes points out in her article, most of her students are either in the A grade range or F grade range. This is because some students decide not to participate at all. In addition, the dropout rate of Lawes's online classes is 20 to 30 percent, which is three times higher than in her traditional classes. The main reason students drop classes is that Lawes cannot address all her students' questions and concerns. She doesn't know if some of her students are struggling to understand the PowerPoint slides or videos she posts because she doesn't see them face to face.

Although online teaching has a lot of disadvantages, Lawes still prefers online courses to traditional courses. This is because online teaching offers something that traditional teaching cannot. Although Lawes has to be more creative to make the lectures both interesting and informative, she enjoys the great advantages of online teaching. Lawes writes,

"...though the lack of a face-to-face connection may be sufficient for some to forego an online option. My experience teaching U.S. history courses online does, however, support that on balance the online format offers historians new opportunities to engage students in the study of the past." (1214)

[9]

In other words, Lawes believes some people oppose the idea of online teaching without looking at the great advantages it brings to education. Specifically, online courses increase the quality of discussions. Most students in her traditional History classes fail because they don't participate in class discussions. In contrast, students in her online classes are more willing to share their views. For example, the ones who normally remain silent during class discussions start to participate. The flexibility of these online classes is also a great advantage. Students have access to lectures until the end of the course. This makes reviewing for exams and quizzes less time-consuming and more convenient. Students can also read or listen to a lecture whenever they want. This encourages more students, especially those from other majors, to enroll in the courses.

Lawes's view is clear. There are some challenges as she moves from traditional teaching to online teaching. Lawes doesn't have the opportunities to learn about each of her student and support them as much as she could in her traditional courses. As a result, her students are more likely to fail the courses.

Lawes, however, admits that there are more advantages than disadvantages. Her students enjoy her new videos, the PowerPoint lectures, and the online discussions. She is able to make her students more interested in the topics and increase the quality of discussions. It seems, at this point, that online classes are suitable for teaching humanities. The question is, can online teaching be applied to STEM courses as well? Susan Ramlo, a Physics professor at the University of Akron, says no. Ramlo's college has been using a new method of teaching called "flipped classrooms" (463). Instructors in these classrooms use both online tools and face-to-face lectures in teaching. Students are expected to watch posted videos and complete online quizzes before each class. During each class, students have the chance to prove their understanding of the topic through class discussions. The use of both online tools and face-to-face discussions yield satisfying results. Students are encouraged to interact with both their instructors and their peers. This makes it easier for them to understand the Physics concepts. However, in a research conducted by Ramlo and her colleagues, when the students are asked if they want to enroll in a physics class that is taught 100% online, most of them answer no. Ramlo presents the results of her research in the article "Student Views Regarding Online Freshmen Physics." The students enrolled in technical physics classes are asked to share their experience with online learning. Unlike what the college's administrators expect, most of the students insist they prefer traditional classes to online classes (463). One student comments on his college's online courses:

"For humanities and writing based courses they are great. They are terrible for science and math...Classes with advanced math concepts (trig, calc, etc.) as well as physics, statics, etc. should not solely be taught online." (469)

This student, like many other students in the research, believes the interaction with his instructors and peers is crucial in STEM courses. I totally agree with his point due to the lack of application opportunities. The goal of STEM courses is to help students build up problem solving skills. These skills come from the understanding of concepts and solving many problems, which can only be achieved through conversations with the instructor and other students. My experience of taking multiple STEM courses online have led me to believe that it is extremely hard to gain a full understanding of a concept by just watching videos and participating in online discussions. Most of the concepts, in my opinion, are counterintuitive. In order to make these concepts more understandable, a professor has to possess the characteristics Edmundson describes. He needs to know which part of the concept is confusing to his students and thus spend more time on that part. It is very hard for a professor to do this in online classes as he doesn't actually see his students or know how they feel about the lecture.

Edmundson, Lawes, and Ramlo all agree that the biggest weakness of online classes is the lack of student-instructor interaction and student-student interaction. In order to make online education a great method of teaching and learning, this problem has to be resolved. The lack of interaction, despite being a difficult problem, is completely solvable. Alisa Stern, a professor of the City University of New York, is teaching all her classes online. Alisa also faces the challenge of making online classes more interactive, but she has succeeded in creating online classes that are as interactive as traditional classes. According to Stern,

“Collaboration and communication among IT staff, administrators, and instructors are key to the implementation of an outstanding online program, as new interactive technology is constantly being developed and must be tested in the cyber classroom.” (493)

According to Stern, the quality of an online course relies on how well the instructor takes advantage of the new, online tools. Although online teaching is more challenging than traditional teaching, the instructor has sufficient tools and knowledge to make the online experience as great as a traditional one. The collaboration among instructors, IT staff, and administrators is crucial as it helps the instructors exploit the great values of the new tools. Stern believes an instructor who is interested in running an online classroom should start to learn and practice using the new tools that help him build an interactive and effective online learning environment. Although this may seem time-consuming, it is what makes an online course successful.

Alisa Stern spends two years learning how to build an online course through course design workshops. Stern admits she doesn't like the idea of teaching a class online at the beginning. However, after learning how to create a successful online course, Stern is able to create highly interactive online courses that allow her to learn much more about her students than in traditional courses. In her article, “Bridge the Gap: Replicating the Interactivity of the Physical Classroom in an Online Environment,” Stern shares different tools she uses to teach her classes. To increase the interaction with her students, Stern sends out short announcements regularly to remind her students of upcoming events and due dates. She also sends out “a random comment about current events or a humorous anecdote” (486). According to Stern, her students find these very entertaining and are more willing to interact with her. During class discussions, Stern uses a tool called “VoiceThread” (489). Students are asked to upload a profile photo before entering the discussion. During the discussion, they can send their comments by text, video, or audio. Stern's students find it easier to grasp the ideas of the lesson and are more willing to share their opinions. The discussions are therefore more interesting and informative. To answer her students' questions, Stern holds “virtual office hours” (486) a few times every week. She uses Skype to call her students and

check on their progress. During these calls, Stern is able to address any important concepts that aren't included in the previous discussions as well as any questions or concerns her students may have. By the end of her courses, many students actually become friends, and Stern also gets to know many great students. Her use of various tools creates strong interactions with her students and also makes learning more enjoyable for her students.

The interaction between students and instructors is extremely important for an effective educational environment. The role of an instructor is to facilitate the conversations in class and to address the questions and concerns students may have in a way that doesn't confuse them. Although instructors in online STEM courses and online humanities courses face some different challenges when moving from traditional teaching to online teaching, they all have one thing in common. They all admit that it is harder for instructors, especially those of STEM courses, to create this interaction with their students in online courses because they don't actually see their students face-to-face. To eliminate the lack of interaction and maximize the great advantages of online education, great efforts must come from both instructors and students. Instructors should attend course design training so that they can have full knowledge of the available tools that help them exploit the great advantages of online education. Students should actively participate in the all activities and be ready to give constructive feedback about the courses. The feedback will help instructors to know what they need to improve on and thus make better online courses in the future. Online education is still a new concept for many of us. We still have a lot of work to do. We, however, have sufficient tools and capabilities to make online education possible and more impactful for online learners. Our goal in the future is to enhance online instructors' competency in using the available tools so that they have enough confidence and knowledge to run online courses effectively.

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Dat Tran  
FROM MY SIX-YEAR OLD SELF TO THE THIRTY-SIX-YEAR OLD  
AMY TAN: WHY IS HOMECOMING SPECIAL?

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It's three o'clock in the morning, and we're on a three-wheel truck, heading towards Tan Son Nhat airport for my flight back to the U.S. The July air is heavy and moist, signaling the beginning of the monsoon season. I rest my chin on my left hand, watching the streets of Saigon, thinking about what I've experienced for the past two weeks in Vietnam.

Two weeks ago, I saw my parents for the first time in three years, and I'm about to say goodbye to them again. "Dat, check your baggage. We're here," my mom says. I look over my shoulder as my father slowly steers the truck into the parking lot. "We still have over an hour until your flight, let's find something to eat," my father suggests.

My mind starts wandering as we walk towards a coffee shop across the street. I spent a lot of time with my parents for the past two weeks. I helped my mom prepare a pot of Pho for our family and invited some neighbors over for our farewell dinner. I went fishing with my dad a few times a week. For some reason, I still feel dissatisfied and incomplete. I feel like there's something I could have done to make our experience more enjoyable. "Hey Dat, take a look at this," mom says while handing me a black and white photo of our family. My parents were holding my hands as we walked on a beach. "Look how small you were. We were in Nha Trang. You were six years old back then," my mom cheerfully says. "We were going to an aquarium that day, but I left my wallet in the hotel. We took a walk along the beach instead," my dad comments. I feel as if a strong force is spreading from the photo and taking us all back to that day in Nha Trang. For the rest of the hour, none of us says a word, probably because no words could express our feelings. That photo is always in my wallet, as a reminder of a magical moment I will never forget.

Every homecoming story has its own unique moment when time freezes and then reverses, when nothing exists but memories and emotions. In Amy Tan's short story, "A Pair of Tickets," the magical moment for Jing-mei is when Jing and her sisters admire the Polaroid photo of themselves. Our main character finally reunites with her sisters and fulfills her mother's dream. In a few sentences, Jing carries us through one of the most powerful moments of her life,

"My sisters and I watch quietly together, eager to see what develops. The gray-green surface changes to the bright colors of our three images, sharpening and deepening all at once... Together

we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish.” (Tan 316)

The sisters seem to be living in another realm of space, where nothing exists but emotions and memories. When the narrator says their figures “develop,” she implies the stillness of the surrounding atmosphere and slowness of time. The polaroid picture, with its “gray-green surface” slowly “sharpening” and “deepening” greatly signifies this effect. Time seems to slow down; Jing and her sisters feel the presence of their mother. It is as if her “mother’s dead spirit” (Tan 314) is blending into the picture and watching over them, with her mouth “open” as her “long-cherished wish” comes true.

Most magical moments in homecoming stories are connected to particular objects. For Jing, that object is the Polaroid photo of her sisters and herself. Every time Jing looks at this photo, she will have a chance to relive that moment. At the beginning of the story, Jing wishes for a miracle that could bring her mom back to life. She has discovered that miracle—the photo of the three sisters. The black and white photo of my family is my little miracle. It is a time machine I can use to revisit my last moment with my parents and the day when we took a walk along the beach of Nha Trang. As I read Jing’s story and reflect on my own story, I also realize that the most powerful moments often come late. Why did Jing’s father wait until the end of their trip to tell the moving story of her mother? Why did Jing wait 36 years to ask about the meaning her name? Why did my mother wait until our last moment together to hand me the most beautiful picture of our family? Before her journey, Jing had little intention of knowing her roots. At the end of the trip, however, she was transformed by the experience. For me, living with my parents for two weeks brings back memories that are important to me and gives me a chance to better understand my parents. It seems magical moments come only when we’re ready for them and when we need them the most, to remind us of the moment we become new people.

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Calvin Merseal

PAINTING REFLECTIONS: COOPERATION WITH INFLUENCE IN  
POSTMODERN WORKS

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In the postmodern tradition the relationship between the art and what has come before is one of the most essential and definitive elements. The relationship between an author or artist and their work is intimately tied to the relationship between the author and his influences. In most cases this manifests itself in the artist's full recognition and confrontation of the influence, and while for some the confrontation is anxious and aggressive, there can also be a cooperative harmony formed between the postmodern artist and their influences. It is this harmony, and the postmodern stylistic elements that arise from it, which develop a particular brand of meta-creation. The result is a piece of literature or art where the subject becomes the context established by influence, and in doing so the work becomes interconnected with its origins. The stylistic forms which this cooperation with influence commonly result in are intertextuality, pastiche, and parody—each style establishing an intimate connection between the author's work and the influence that inspired it. By embracing the power of influence, postmodern authors, screen-writers, and even musicians reinvent the very meaning of art by subverting artistic absolutism for the sake of critical reexaminations of the reflections of the past.

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Works across the spectrum of the postmodern tradition are representative of this artistic affair with influence. Focusing specifically on the novels *Ghostwritten* (1999) by David Mitchell and *The New York Trilogy* (1986) by Paul Auster, Quentin Tarantino's film *Kill Bill*, and the Jethro Tull album *Thick as a Brick* (1972), it is possible to examine the most significant stylistic elements across various artistic mediums. Each of these works expresses at least one of stylistic features which derive from cooperation with influence; some iteration or combination of intertextuality, parody, or pastiche. In addition to embodying these major stylistic elements, each of these works is orchestrated with polyphonic structures that eliminate the singularity of the author. This feature, alongside the aforementioned elements, creates a work that exists in a realm of relativity to its influences rather than one dictated by the isolated voice of the artist.

To understand what makes this method unusual, and by those same lines understand what makes these works postmodern, it is necessary to look closely at what postmodern writing is. John Barth exposes the complicated nature of this task in his essay "The Literature of Replenishment." By examining the various possible definitions of postmodernism, Barth paints a complex and fluid definition of what a postmodern work typically is. He addresses first that postmodernism is initially observable in contrast to the reimagined

realism of the modernists, presenting a scholarly view that states “postmodern writers write a fiction that is more and more about itself and its processes, less and less about objective reality and life in the real world” (Barth 200). In this view, postmodernism exists in its contrast to the modernist tradition, but Barth suggests an alternative. Barth denies the need to reject the modern and pre-modern works as if they didn’t happen, and in fact insists on acknowledging that “they *did* happen” (202). He goes on to define the perfect post-modern work as one that embraces the works of the past and keeps “the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back” (203). This sentiment seems to support the cooperative relationship between the postmodern and its influences which the styles of parody, pastiche, and intertextuality successfully represent.

Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* embodies many of Barth’s post-modern features, and consequently represents a strong connection between the text and its predecessors. In this case the influence is drawn from an entire genre which is integrated fully into the text. The genre in this case is detective fiction, and much of *The New York Trilogy* can be interpreted as a pastiche of this genre. Auster overtly defines, utilizes, and ultimately subverts the conventions of detective fiction in each section of his novel in such a way as to simultaneously pay tribute to the form and complicate the meanings derived from it. Aside from featuring private investigators in all three of the novel’s narratives, Quinn from the *City of Glass* section writes detective fiction before masquerading as a detective himself, and at time the text even forces the reader into the role of a detective. Within the first few pages Auster makes his reader painfully aware of his tribute through Quinn’s words; “in the good mystery there is nothing wasted, so sentence, no word that is not significant” (Auster 9). With one move, Auster embeds the reader into his detective pastiche by ensuring that they will look for clue after clue with all the deliberation of a gumshoe.

Auster’s homage to mystery fiction is one key way in which he displays an intimate relationship with his influences, but as Barth suggests in his essay, mere imitation does not make a postmodern work (Barth 203). It is Auster’s subversion within his detective pastiche in *The New York Trilogy* that completes the postmodern cycle. Fascinatingly, it is primarily through the use of intertextuality and polyphony that Auster achieves his subversion, since *The New York Trilogy* is presented as three separate stories with no typical connection in plot. Each section of the novel is its own text, and each depends upon the other for what wholeness can be found. Where the reader of detective fiction would find an answer, Auster’s reader will find a question. The intertextuality is both embedded and extended to the entire realm of detective fiction on which the understanding of Auster’s pastiche relies. Through the polyphonic presentation of three separate narratives possessing even more distinct perspectives, Auster demonstrates a significant partnership with his influences.

Despite Auster’s uses of pastiche and intertextuality, it is not explicitly

confirmed that *The New York Trilogy* is definitively postmodern in its execution. If Barth's definition of the perfect postmodern work asks for a mastery of the modern and/or pre-modern, then Auster's utilization of detective fiction outside the realm of strict imitation confirms his postmodern achievement. In the chapter "Postmodernism and the Literary Arts" from the book *Beginning Postmodernism*, Tim Woods list several characteristics which are dominant in postmodernism, among which is the following: "the decentering of the subject by discursive systems, and the inscription of multiple fictive selves" (Woods 79). Because of the spilt narrative and the numerous narrative selves that appear in *The New York Trilogy* it is virtually impossible to locate a center within the text. Within both Woods categorical definitions and Barth's reflective expectations, *The New York Trilogy* embodies a postmodern work which refuses to reject its influences.

In David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* we can see the same decentralization elevated to an uncanny degree of polyphony. In many ways, *Ghostwritten* mirrors the stylistic tactics seen in Auster's work which so clearly suggested a postmodern artist in sync with their influences. The two texts are the same in that they employ both pastiche and intertextuality, but they are different in that Mitchell employs pastiche only subtly while elevating the intertextuality and polyphony to unparalleled levels. *Ghostwritten* features nine interconnected narratives told from as many different perspectives. Each of these stories possesses an independent identity, and yet is inseparable from the whole of the novel. And like Auster, Mitchell creates a pastiche within his text, only his is a far more subtle tribute to ghost narratives. Either by telling of a haunting or a wandering entity or simply by inserting casual puns to ghosts and ghost stories, Mitchell saturates his text with nods to ghostly tales. Unlike Auster, Mitchell's pastiche is channeled through and submissive to the use of intertextuality.

*Ghostwritten* is possessed with the shadows of other narratives and the various connections between them. Aside from the connections that exist between the novel's nine separate narratives, there are characters within the text that reappear in Mitchell's later works, and there are countless references to other artistic material that holds a great deal of relevance within the text. The references within the text are everywhere, and at one point in the text, Mitchell even references one of Auster's works (*The Music of Chance*) directly (Mitchell 262). However, it is the intertextuality embodied by certain musical references that stand out most at times. These references range from the humorous—ghostly—reference to Procol Harum's "Whiter Shade of Pale" (354) to ones that hold a great deal more significance within the story. One of the most interesting references appears when Bat Segundo imagines asking Freddy Mercury about the meaning of "Bohemian Rhapsody" in the midst of an apocalyptic panic (395). In a novel that is so concerned with what is real and what isn't, it is poignant to ponder the meaning of a song with the opening line "is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"

Mitchell's powerful and copious usage of intertextual references displays a clear mastery of influence. However, where Auster's mastery was of a genre, Mitchell's is a mastery of a broad cultural and artistic cannon. Nonetheless, like Auster, Mitchell has achieved an obliging relationship with his influences. *Ghostwritten* also embodies another of the postmodern standards which Woods outlined in his essay; "narrative fragmentation and narrative reflexivity; narratives which double back on their own presuppositions: (Woods 82). With each successive narrative section of *Ghostwritten*, what was known about the previous section changes. The fragments each possess a part of the meaning for each of the other parts, which constantly calls the reality of the text into question—a feature which is ultimately another example of Mitchell's mastery of intertextuality.

Expanding beyond the scope of the postmodern novel and into the realm of film reveals a writer who, like Mitchell, has mastered a wide variety of cultural and artistic elements. Quentin Tarantino's film *Kill Bill* manages to embody pastiche, intertextuality, and even parody simultaneously. Tarantino achieves this on many levels that are all connected to the overall structure of the film. *Kill Bill* is representative of an amalgamation of various film styles within the tradition of action movies, martial arts films, westerns, and revenge narratives. The intertextual references within the film are so frequent and so well-integrated that it is almost impossible to trace them all. Even David Caradine's role as Bill in the film is a nod to the 1970s television program *Kung Fu* for which he became famous—a show that is referenced at other times within the film as well. The film is heavily built upon intertextual references that it almost becomes a masterpiece of amalgamation.

While the intertextuality of *Kill Bill* alone supports Tarantino's expertise at cooperating with his numerous influences, the fact that the intertextuality is tied to an artistic presentation which wavers ceaseless between pastiche and parody cannot be ignored. It is easy to acknowledge the pastiche of not one, but many cinematic styles in *Kill Bill*. One example is the direct homage to Bruce Lee and his films as Beatrix wears the iconic yellow jumpsuit from *Game of Death* as she confronts O-Ren Ishii. This tribute and countless others could be used to argue that the whole film is pastiche—and yet at times it veers more towards parody. The humorous caricature Pai Mei as the wise master and the comical and cartoon-like antics that surround his interactions with Beatrix are too hyperbolic and satirical not to represent a stylistic parody. Beyond the achievement of utilizing all three forms which provide evidence of a postmodern artist in tune with his influences, *Kill Bill* exemplifies another of Woods' postmodern criteria: "the abolition of the cultural divide between high and popular forms of culture, embracing all in *mélange*" (Woods 82). By taking cinematic genres often chastised for their simplicity and inanity and positioning them together between satire and tribute, Tarantino was able to create a postmodern tour de force.

Finally, we can find these postmodern elements even within the realm

of rock music—or more appropriately, progressive rock music. Jethro Tull's 1972 album *Thick as a Brick* is a masterful stylistic parody that possesses its own wealth of intertextual references. The album, consisting of one 42-minute track, was written specifically with the intent to parody the inflated elitism of the progressive rock movement. Proving to embody irony in its parody, this bombastic epic defines humanity as “being geared towards the average rather than the exceptional,” while presenting a show of virtuosic artistry musically, poetically, and conceptually. Filled with cultural references from lyricist Ian Anderson's childhood—including children's characters like Biggles and Superman—the lyrics are a feat of stylistic intertextuality as well as parody. Yet the true mastery of this work is its parodic power, denying even itself through the album's unique packaging; a 12-page faux newspaper featuring a cover story about the child-prodigy poet Gerald Bostock—the fictional author of the poem that serves as the song's lyrics. Not only does the parody show a mastery of the influence by the artist, the parody itself became essential to the canon that inspired it.

It is clear that across numerous widely varying mediums within the tradition of postmodernism, the struggle to negotiate with influences rather than negate them is prevalent. The use of intertextuality, pastiche, and parody has proven to be a powerful method for achieving a cooperative relationship between the postmodern world and the influences which it is often expected to refute. That the use of these stylistic methods and the harmony which they create between the preexisting art and the postmodern art seem to coincide not only with Barth's view of the perfect postmodern work, but with the more standardized expectations outlined by Woods, leads to a potential answer to the slippery definition of the postmodern. It is not enough simply to be aware of influences, nor is helpful to carry them as a burden or reject them entirely. The postmodern creation depends upon a mastery of influence that must be subjected to the critical uncertainty belonging to the postmodern lens—postmodernism is a practice in imperfect mastery.

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Ferris Fynboh

## CONFORMITY AND NONCONFORMITY

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In his 1841 essay “Self-Reliance,” Ralph Waldo Emerson declares, “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist” (238). Though he could not have known it, this was perhaps the fundamental patriarchal principle that informed the actions of Susan Glaspell’s characters in *Trifles* in 1916, causing men such as Mr. Peters and Mrs. Hale to underestimate not only the woman they are investigating for murder, but their own wives, and allowing Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters their very rebellion: only *women* conform, Emerson seems to argue; men like *us* are the real catalysts for change. Men must not conform, and nonconformity is only for men. Don’t be a *girl*, he seems to say. Perhaps this is why Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters rebel by subverting the patriarchy through obedient silence, acting through inaction. Their decision requires us to question not only gender roles, but the nature of nonconformity itself. Can one truly be nonconformist by acting within an expected societal framework in a subversive way? Then again, can such actions truly be conformist? Conformity and nonconformity become blurred in Glaspell’s piece, each becoming an aspect of the other, until the dichotomy itself is all but shattered.

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The Online Etymology Dictionary gives the following history of the word “conform”: mid-14c., *confourmen*, “be obedient (to God), **comply**,” from Old French *conformer* “conform (to), agree (to), make or be similar, **be agreeable**” (13c.) and directly from Latin *conformare* “to fashion, to form, to shape; educate; modify”.... Meaning “to make of the same form or character; bring into harmony, **make agreeable**,” and intransitive sense of “act in accordance with an example” are from late 14c. (“conform (v.),” bold text mine)

What particularly intrigues me about this etymology are the given meanings pertaining to agreeability. This is perhaps the most patriarchal expectation of women: smile more, talk less, don’t disagree, don’t think—*don’t be a bitch*. Conformity for women is inherently tied to likeability, and it is for this reason that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters’ “conformist” subversion is so successful. In choosing to remain silent about their discovery, they were actually doing what was expected of them—they chose to shut up and let the men speak.

However, while they were technically doing what was expected of them, they were also disobeying an explicit direction: “Keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us,” says George Henderson (5). They are



explicitly disobeying not only men or their husbands, but quite literally the law—to which Mrs. Peters is “married” (14). And while the women could convincingly claim innocence if caught, claim they thought the bird was only another trifle, they very clearly know that it is not. While Mrs. Peters claims their husbands would “laugh” if they knew the women were so “stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary,” she seems almost to be working to convince herself. She is nervous, and the stage directions say she is fidgeting and speaking in “a false voice.” Meanwhile, Mrs. Hale all but admits to understanding the relevance of the bird to the case, replying to Mrs. Peters, “Maybe they would [laugh]—maybe they wouldn’t” (13). Therefore, while they are technically conforming to their role—that is, they are remaining agreeable to men—they are also using that role to support the woman they both empathize with, at the cost of that which is in the interests of men and even the patriarchy.

Within oppressed or marginalized communities—especially ones highly segregated—a type of internal code of ethics often springs up. Whether the point of this alternate morality is to deliberately undermine the existing power structure, a means of survival within that framework, or both is highly debatable. Either way, this method of subversion is illustrated continuously throughout Glaspell’s play. The women are marginalized primarily through being ignored and undermined—which, it turns out, enables their subversive actions in the first place. If women’s minds and autonomy were respected, understood, or considered, they would never be trusted to the extent that they are in what amounts to an active crime scene. “But you know juries when it comes to women,” says Henderson. Perhaps these men are capable of understanding that a woman might have the ability to plan and execute the murder of her husband, but it simply never occurs to them to view her empathetically or to consider that their wives might do so. Perhaps a woman is capable of criminality—but not *their* wives, because their wives are good wives.

Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale’s empathy is yet another way in which the women are both subversive and conforming: women are *expected* to be emotional, empathetic; they are supposed to cry when a bird dies. But what is ignored by a patriarchal society are the parts of empathy that aren’t pretty or agreeable or soft-spoken. These men expect mothers, but not mama bears. Women and girls are supposed to passively weep over the loss of their kittens; they are not supposed to need to be physically restrained from attacking the boy who murdered it, as Mrs. Peters was (12). They certainly aren’t supposed to empathize with a woman who turned to murder because her bird’s suffocation was too like her own.

In the early twentieth century, women were supposed to remain silent, and fill the silence with the laughter of children. Most people never paused to consider how they might hate the silence that bound them, how the loss of their means of filling up that silence—whether it be a bird or a child—could wreck a human being. “I know what stillness is,” says Mrs. Peters. She



may be married to the law, may wish desperately to uphold the law; but the law that has repeatedly ruled her has been silence and the breaking of silence, maternity and the loss of its object. The moral choice to have empathy for someone else who was ruled by that same, unjust law ultimately proves, for her, greater than marriage or official legal doctrine.

The most blatant nonconformist aspect of Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale's choice is that it places perceived sisterhood as a higher priority than marriage. "A sheriff's wife is married to the law," says Henderson to Mrs. Peters. And while she had hesitated in the beginning, her empathy has already persuaded her to defend Minnie Wright's secret. Not even the reminder that she is "married to the law" can change her mind. Mrs. Hale appeared to prioritize sisterhood from the very beginning, defending Mrs. Wright's housekeeping: "Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry," she says (6). And while Mrs. Peters' priorities shift from duty to empathy, Mrs. Hale's shift from mostly passive empathy to the active, empathetic duty of her private, distinctly feminine moral code: "Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?" she demands, adding, "I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women." This shift is not only distinctive of her subversion, but it also is the final push that allows their subversion to be successful: active empathy is what allows her to be successful in hiding the bird where Mrs. Peters "cannot touch it [the bird], goes to pieces, stands there helpless" (14).

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While Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale act subversively, it is in a framework of complacency and of conforming to their own gendered predispositions. This dash of conformity is what ultimately allows their nonconformity to be successful and what lends them the strength to take action to hide the canary. Breaking down this dichotomy is a time-honored tradition among marginalized people—and ultimately is what allows marginalized people to overcome their oppression, slowly but surely. Not by quilting, but by knotting.

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Ferris Fynboh

IT'S SAFE INSIDE: SELF-RELIANCE AND SELF-PRESERVATION IN  
THE EMERSONIAN IDEAL

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A little over two months ago, I made the hardest choice of my life thus far. I chose not to care what they thought about me. By “they” I mean my parents—the most important people in my life—and by “me,” I mean my queerness. I wrote a letter, and I walked into the kitchen and asked them not to interrupt, and then I read it to them. They didn’t hate me. Later, I would feel light: I would tell my best friend that it went well, and I would think I was free again. Later, I would feel Self-Reliant. I had braced for the world to do what it has always done—Emerson says, “For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure” and, like Emerson’s ideal, I prepared myself to “treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment” (240).

It sounds idyllic, doesn’t it? The American dream: I was afraid, but I overcame; I relied on my own resourcefulness and strength to choose authenticity, even when the “easy” choice would have been safety.

It was not idyllic. The perfect narrative we have constructed of Self-Reliance fails to mention the possibility that, perhaps, safety can be the hardest choice anyone ever makes—and that sometimes, for some people, it is not just the right choice, but possibly the *only* choice. When I was sixteen years old, and I wrote in my diary for the first time that yes, I was bisexual, and no, I would never come out, I was choosing safety: I was choosing to give up perfect authenticity in favor of security. I found security to be the greater value of the two. When I was nineteen and I changed my mind (an agonizing three years, slowly inching my way towards the inevitable), it was not because my values had reversed, but because I no longer felt secure in denying myself that authenticity. When I chose authenticity, it was only because I was also choosing safety: I knew that denying myself authenticity would hurt me more than it could ever help.

Isn’t this an interesting dilemma for Mr. Emerson? Emerson who so boldly declares, “My life is not an apology but a life. It is for itself and not for a spectacle.... My life should be unique; it should be an alms, a battle, a conquest, a medicine” (239), who is so determined for his life to be for its own sake in a world that begs for justification, reasons, explanations. He wishes to be his own savior—his own charity, his own advocate, his own healing—and to master himself the way a conqueror masters the kingdom of another.

Though it is easy to dismiss Emerson’s argument as rooted in privilege and exclusionism—what would a well-off white man know about it anyway?, we may ask—Emerson’s writings suggest that he himself was queer: “During his early years at Harvard, he said he was ‘strangely attracted’ to a young man

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named Martin Gay, about whom he wrote sexual poetry. Nathaniel Hawthorne was also purportedly one of his infatuations” (“Self-Reliance”). Today, queer people find themselves in a similar struggle to define themselves in a pervasively allocisheteronormative society. Benjamin A. Ha of San Francisco online magazine *The Bold Italic* writes of the 1980s LGBT+ “ball culture” in New York, saying, “Each house would compete at underground balls in performance categories, such as ‘butch queen’...or ‘femme queens’.... Another category included ‘realness,’ to see who could blend in the best as heterosexual.” How, we must wonder, can we be real?

Realness is ever-elusive, even if we do choose to strive for the Emersonian ideal. We have a world where Chechen men are being tortured and murdered by their government for being perceived as queer (Beard)—for not being real enough in a world where we can only be real if we act like everyone else; where our own government—the supposed champion of the individual—is looking to deny legal recognition and protection to transgender persons: to literally make such a state of being into the legally unreal (Green, Benner, and Pear). Emerson says, “No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature” (238), but unreality is a type of violence that is almost impossible to combat: when someone has decided you don’t exist, they become willing to write off your pained screaming merely as an object of the imagination. It is impossible to be safe in such a world.

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Queer rhetoric is multifaceted, as in all matters, regarding the closet. There are those who would have us merely refuse to acknowledge the social construct of the closet—they refuse to come out, because they should not be forced to put their life out on display in any way that is not required of their allocishet peers. They say they are not closeted, because there simply is no closet out of which to emerge. Perhaps Emerson would have agreed that the closet is a false construct, unnecessary and archaic. It’s a noble belief—an ideal. Maybe one day it will be attainable. Currently, it isn’t for the majority of people. Most queer people do not have the privilege to just *live*. It may not be our duty to be activists, but we would be hard-pressed to find a moment of peace in which we could avoid it.

Many take the necessity of coming out a step further—they say that in a country where being queer doesn’t merit the death penalty, it is nothing less than our duty to proclaim our queerness to the world. Alexander Cheves of *The Advocate* gives “13 Reasons Why You Must Come Out of the Closet,” including “Coming out empowers those who can’t,” and “In a world filled with anti-gay leaders pushing for anti-gay policies, coming out is a political act.” Thus, some say that we should not come out in the name of Self-Reliance, but in the name of activism. It is not merely a right or a choice—it is our duty to allow the world to whip us with its displeasure. In this way, authenticity can no longer be an alms or a medicine or a self-conquest—it can only be a conquest of the *other*, which still we uphold as our greatest enemy. Those who argue that we must embrace the inherent subversion of being

queer are still defining subversion by the constraints of an allocisheteronormative society—still playing by someone else’s rules. Emerson said that his life was “for itself and not for a spectacle” (239); individuals, queer and otherwise, who demand the public performance of queerness are requiring a spectacle in order to validate others’ experience. Such individuals still ask us to be beholden to society, ask us to bear the world’s displeasure as our necessary suffering.

Though a plethora of queer people believe coming out is not merely a necessary evil, but a duty, an *act of martyrdom*, there are plenty of others who simply do not feel safe coming out, whether because of practical threats to safety or security, or because they value their interpersonal relationships more than they value the performance of authenticity. One Twitter user, a bisexual man married to a straight woman, writes, “After talking to my therapist today I’m going to wait until next summer to come out. My wife’s not ready for it and tbh she’s more important to me than coming out right now” (@biguy09513426). He has decided that his marriage is more important to him than the ability to shout his truth from the rooftops while still finding a way to make his voice heard and be his authentic self in view of others, as well as to be visible to and accessible to other closeted people, without jeopardizing his anonymity. An anonymous author who is a first-generation immigrant writes in *Everyday Feminism* of coming out, “Asking a person to give up acceptance by their countrymen and not even have it fully in the new land is sometimes too much. At least it is for me.... Could I have gone another way? Of course! My hat goes off to the brave people who do” (“Why I Am Never, Ever, Ever Coming Out of the Closet”)—for her, familial acceptance is a greater value for her and her children than the Emersonian ideal of authenticity. That doesn’t mean it’s easy: it means it’s the better choice for the moment. It needn’t be forever—Emerson says of consistency, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.... With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do” (241)—but maybe it will be. It is a choice some individuals have made based on their unique circumstances and worldviews. It is no less valid.

Emerson said that we must be willing to bear the displeasure of the world, but also that we do not owe anyone a performance of ourselves for the amusement of society. But what happens when the world’s displeasure is not the trivial disapproval of your next door neighbor who prays for you in church every Sunday and never quite looks you in the eye, but the very real power of a minor’s parents to enroll them in conversion therapy, to cut them off financially, or to throw them out of the house?

At sixteen, I chose not to come out of the closet because I decided that my relationship with my parents was too precious to destroy with something as trivial as being myself. At nineteen, I couldn’t bear it any longer. A year of anxiety and intrusive thoughts—I knew which road I’d somehow drifted onto, and I knew that it ended with a life that I eventually wouldn’t be able to bear. I did not choose to come out because I felt ready to cast off the constrictions of society—I chose to come out because society gave me the

choice to actively lie every day of my life or to overshare my truth to everyone I ever met, and the latter was the only choice I could sustain for a lifetime and still have a life worth living. I have not chosen authenticity once in the last three years; I have chosen safety every time. I have chosen to play by society's rules and acknowledge the closet, because the pervasiveness of allocisheteronormativity makes it nearly impossible for any queer person to truly achieve the ideal of Self-Reliance—and because I am young, and I only want to live. It shouldn't take this much work.

What Emerson never said was that safety and authenticity might coincide—sometimes the choice to be authentic is only useful to an individual if they find safety in it. For me, I found that self-inflicted misery was infinitely worse than the world's displeasure. For others, that is not a choice they feel free to make—or it is, but they find more value in remaining hidden than in coming out. This may not be the Emersonian ideal—but, like most ideals, this one might be unattainable. How can we truly be self-reliant without entirely removing ourselves from society?—and if we lack the financial or practical privileges to leave society, or simply don't want to, can we possibly find a way not to abide by the rules or rebel against them, but to live beyond their influence entirely?

Maybe one day.

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Ferris Fynboh  
LIFE-IN-DEATH AND THE SUBLIME

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If the primary attribute of the epic is grandeur, one might entertain the notion that perhaps the highest form of grandeur is the Ultimate. Throughout the genre, one finds the Ultimate in the form of the narrative intersection of life and death, and as, at least in part, the primary, firsthand experience of death. This is true of Dante's *Inferno*, where the narrator descends into Hell; it is true of *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus enters the underworld to meet Tiresias. It is true, too, of *Moby-Dick*, where the ongoing dualism of both the story and of the antihero, Ahab, embody what Coleridge called LIFE-IN-DEATH (103) by showing the simultaneity and separateness of physicality and consciousness in the concrete self, the abstract mind, ideology, and action.

Ahab as the embodiment of LIFE-IN-DEATH is perhaps most apparent as he discusses the phantom pains of his missing leg with the carpenter. Ahab muses,

[32]

How dost thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where thou now standest; aye, and standing there in thy spite? ...And if I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be now so long dissolved; then, why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body? (360)

As he considers not just the afterlife but the possibility of a simultaneous and parallel existence in which some mirror image of ourselves—our souls, perhaps, or unconscious minds, or some other dimension of self that is hostile towards our most conscious understanding of who we are—Ahab does not merely embrace the idea of such a duality of existence: he seems to embody it. His phantom pains are proof of it, at least to him. This is not so very different from the very existence of Coleridge's LIFE-IN-DEATH, and especially when considered beside her “mate” and foil, Death. The Mariner recalls, “The twain [DEATH and LIFE-IN-DEATH] were casting dice” (196) for the possession of his ship's crew. In this way, the Mariner's ship becomes a very literal intersection of the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate, the natural and the supernatural, and life and death. These opposite forces meet not only on board the Mariner's ship, but are forced together, cohabitating in the very being of LIFE-IN-DEATH, who appears, in contrast to DEATH, as a living woman: “*Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free, / *Her* locks were yellow as gold: / *Her* skin was as white as leprosy” (190–192). This is similar



to the *Pequod* becoming the second hearse, even in its crew's final moments of life (Melville 426), and to Ahab's very character, in which a similar violent collapse of the life-death dichotomy has occurred in his physical self: "He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them.... You saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish" (108). In both Ahab and LIFE-IN-DEATH we see similar characteristics: they appear to be living human beings. However, both are marked by some type of rotted lifelessness, and both bear, at least partially, unnaturally white skin.

Melville's perspective on whiteness itself is that it is a symbol of the sublime, which is perhaps the highest quality of the intersection between life and death. He says of it, "Nor...does Nature in her least palpable but not the less malicious agencies, fail to enlist among her forces this crowning attribute of the terrible" (161). He names white as a color which is almost powerful in itself: he claims the human mind cannot help but react to it with wonder and dread—it is not merely a symbol of the sublime, it is sublime. It is this whiteness which is one of the most easily recognizable characteristics of Moby-Dick himself and of the Albatross, as well as these creatures' narrative opposites: Ahab and LIFE-IN-DEATH.

While Moby-Dick is the narrative opposite of Ahab, just as DEATH is the foil of LIFE-IN-DEATH, and although Moby-Dick, like DEATH, is the physical death-bringer to the crew of the *Pequod*, Moby-Dick is far more the narrative match of the Albatross. The Mariner says of the Albatross,

[33]

As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.  
...  
And round and round it flew.  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
The helmsman steered us through! (Coleridge 65–70)

The Mariner correlates the two events—the ship's safe passage with the Albatross's appearance and satisfaction—and seems to imply that the Albatross has caused the turn in fortune. Later, when the Albatross is killed—"With my cross-bow / I shot the Albatross" (81–82)—it is again this event that is blamed for the later horrors. However, though we may take this correlation to confirm the sailors' superstitions, we might just as well believe that Moby-Dick is consciously murderous, consciously destructive. In fact, both of these creatures are animals—they may act or react in the interest of their own protection and safety, but they do not will or wish fortune, misfortune, or murder upon any other being for the sake, purely, of malice. Thus, both the White Whale and the Albatross, as is further emphasized by their sublime whiteness, are but blank slates, upon which mankind cannot help but project their expectations, preconceptions, and superstitions. Melville says of white-

ness, “in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?” (165). In other words, that which we consider blank—whiteness—is simultaneously the nothing and the all: it is the nothing upon which we cast everything comprehensible, and it is the incomprehensible everything in which we see nothing. It is the same with the Albatross and the White Whale: both are merely creatures, in the way that white is merely a color. But both seem to, in some unspoken way, name themselves the object of humankind’s projections. Thus, both become, in simultaneity, the neutral and the symbol, the destroyed and the destructive, the condemned and the death-bringer, the good luck and the misfortune. Both become the symbol of symbolism itself—dualism embodied in one character, just as Ahab embodies the dualism of LIFE-IN-DEATH.

The dualism of the epic narrative is notably present in yet another aspect of Melville’s novel: the concept of the sole-survivor as the compelled narrator. Just as the Mariner, the sole trophy of LIFE-IN-DEATH, wanders endlessly, seeking liberation from his own story—“And till my ghastly tale is told, / This heart within me burns” (Coleridge 584–585), says the Mariner—Ishmael seems to suffer a similar fate. Similarly, both the Mariner and Ishmael undergo an archetypal pilgrimage, which John S. Gentile describes as “a story of the soul’s pilgrimage towards redemption” (405). Both have a dual journey. For the Mariner, it is at first the voyage itself, and then the cyclical act of seeking redemption through narrative:

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
With a woeful agony,  
Which forced me to begin my tale;  
And then it left me free. (578 – 581)

By recounting his story again and again, often to strangers, he is seeking penance as a way to cope with his trauma and survivor’s guilt. By being shown as the “winnings” of Life-In-Death, the Mariner is almost stripped of his self—being a storyteller usurps his personhood. This is similar to the way Ishmael, after his first pilgrimage aboard the *Pequod*, seems to embark on a similar pilgrimage in the act of narration. Like the Mariner, Ishmael’s personhood is stripped away throughout the narrative, until it is even unclear whether he himself is narrating. He simply fades into the mist of the story itself.

As Gentile points out, the act of narration itself can be seen as the action of a pilgrim. He claims that a primary part of pilgrimage is the act of ritual, including the ritual of circumambulation. Gentile writes, “The entire novel of *Moby-Dick* may be considered one long circumambulation in language around the idea of the White Whale.... The very act of circumambulation elevates its object to the divine” (408). That is to say, by considering this

sublime object of his own projections—*Moby-Dick* in the case of Ishmael, and the Albatross in the case of the Mariner—from every possible angle in a narrative circumambulation, both the narrator and the reader become entrenched in an act of ritual worship. By so worshiping this topic, the reader is forced to consider the object as divine or supernatural, even if they might have previously disagreed. One may open *Moby-Dick* thinking to find a story about a whale; by the end, they cannot quite help but harbor that secret suspicion that Ahab was right: the Whale is omnipotent, and malicious, and sublime. Thus, Ishmael is enabling Ahab's twisted fantasy in much the same way that the Mariner caused his own woes by murdering the Albatross.

If a pilgrimage is “multivalent and polyvocal... ‘shown to serve multiple functions simultaneously’” (Gentile 404)—that is to say, if it is inherently pluralistic in its function—and if its function is to transform “‘the soul from unworthiness to worthiness’ and ‘from a state of sin to one of redemption’” (qtd. Gentile 405), then we might say that the narrative pilgrimage is inherently dualistic: it acts along a binary between unworthiness and worthiness. If we take the epic as the ultimate end of dualism—the binary collapse and the narrative integration and simultaneity between life and death, which leads to a similar integration and simultaneity between nearly every other dichotomy imaginable—then it is impossible to deny that Melville's best-known work, far more than even a pilgrimage, deserves a place beside Homer and Dante. The meeting of life and death upon Ahab's “death-glorious ship” (Melville 426) and in Ahab's very being, which is the ultimate binary collapse—caught between the death of his whalebone leg and the life of his body, his madness and his awareness, his physicality and his spirituality, his mortality and his ambition—makes way for further binary collapse: the implosion of Ishmael's tension between narrator and self, the simultaneity between *Moby-Dick*'s sublimity and omnipotence and his animalistic, conscienceless nature. Indeed, even the binary that our cisheteronormative society leaves most unquestioned—that between the masculine and the feminine—is annihilated as Ishmael contemplates the intersection between the “feminine air” and the “masculine sea”: “But though thus contrasting within, the contrast was only in shades and shadows without; those two seemed one; it was only the sex, as it were, that distinguished them” (Melville 404). The cyclical, fluid ideology that remains leaves us orphaned, alone with ourselves: the *Pequod* has sunk, but we float on, clinging to Life-Death and surrounded by a sea of the sublime.

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Ferris Fynboh

LOLITA: WHEN ENGLISH CONSENTED TO A STORY ABOUT  
RAPE OR THE VICTIMS' TALE

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Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, widely misunderstood and underestimated, has received a great deal of criticism throughout the years for portraying the pedophilic rape and abuse of Dolores Haze by Humbert Humbert. However, despite the undeniable events of the plot, *Lolita* is not a book about pedophilia; rather, it is a book about what Nabokov called his "love affair" with the English language ("On a Book" 316). This is clearly shown by H.H.'s two poems in the book: the "maniac's masterpiece" (*Lolita* 255–257) and the death sentence (*Lolita* 299–300). The maniac's masterpiece is, truly, an exquisitely crafted poem; with steady feminine rhymes and a deliciously half-predictable, tripping meter, the reader cannot deny that H.H. (and, of course, his author) is a masterful writer. In sharp contrast however, the death sentence takes our expectations for Humbert's mastery of poetry and then shatters it, pushing beauty off the sharp cliff of language to let it fall, unmourned, to an inglorious grave. If we take these poems—and, indeed, *Lolita* as a whole—as a metaphor for Nabokov's relationship with the English language, it becomes quickly apparent that the maniac's masterpiece functions as an example of Nabokov's ability to use language as both an art and a science—a tool wielded with precision to evoke the hopeless, desperate longing of Humbert for Dolores Haze, while the death sentence functions as an example of Nabokov's "private tragedy" (316) that English, as the object of his seduction, has an agency which he cannot tame with the same accuracy that he could with his "infinitely docile Russian tongue" (317).

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The maniac's masterpiece, Humbert's articulation of his longing for Dolores after she leaves him, is an exquisitely complex poem. Although the meter is not consistent, it is primarily an anapestic, trochaic, and iambic mixed meter, which creates a tripping, skipping feeling for the reader—like words tumbling over themselves desperately, or a child's jump rope rhyme. The steady ABAB meter with a repetition of the A rhyme and the repetition of certain key phrases throughout the poem adds to the nursery rhyme feeling, while the elegant diction and sudden insertion of French brings the childlike want into the realm of sophistication and adulthood. The dichotomy between these two impressions creates a feeling of suspension or immortality for the reader, as though we are left hanging between Dolly's stolen childhood and Humbert's rejection of adulthood. The alternation between masculine and feminine rhymes and other devices such as apostrophe, allusion to both classical and modern references, *blazón*, and symbolism show us Humbert's/Nabokov's mastery of English poetry. Indeed, the French stanza

does not seem to us to be a failing to use English, but rather an attempt to conceal the meaning that a precise use of English would expose. Alfred Appel, Jr. translates the French stanza as follows:

The other night, a cold air from the opera forced me to take to my  
bed;  
Broken note—he who puts his trust in it is quite foolish!  
It is snowing, the décor collapses, Lolita!  
Lolita, what have I done with your life? (“Note 256/3”)

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This stanza is perhaps the most poignant in the poem. Most of the previous stanzas focus on Humbert’s desire for Dolly—“Wanted, wanted: Dolores Haze” (255)—, his inability to empathize with her plight—“*Why* are you hiding, darling?” (255)—, or his blaming her for her own victimhood—the repetition of “wanted” has the ring of a criminal “Wanted” ad, and “My Dolly, my folly! Her eyes were *vair* / And never closed when I kissed her” (256) seems to implicate her as being his Achilles heel and as being complicit in her being raped. Although the poem is not a sonnet, the French stanza seems to act almost as a volta. He describes his own perceived victimhood in the first line (“forced me to take to my bed”) and the wreckage of his façade of a life (“the décor collapses, Lolita!”), but the last line acknowledges incontrovertibly that what he has done to Dolores Haze has wrecked her life, her innocence, and her childhood. After this turning point, Humbert seems to acknowledge his complicity in, if not total responsibility for, the crime he has inflicted on Dolores. In the next stanza, he declares “Of hate and remorse, I’m dying. / ... / And again I hear you crying” (256): a confession that he has done something which merits remorse, and an acknowledgment that she has suffered for this. After this, the next two stanzas invoke the police, tying back to the air of criminality. Though the second-to-last stanza returns to a blazon, the reader must see it differently than the first stanza; additionally, the line, “Her dream-gray gaze never flinches” (257) seems to lend her an air, not just of submission or resilience, but of agency, determination, and even dignity—a thing he had not previously acknowledged in the poem that names her “a child wife” and describes him “Plowing his Molly in every State / Among the protected wild life” (256). The final stanza describes the downfall of Humbert Humbert, but notably absent is any plea for help, salvation, or redemption from Dolly. Though he continues his apostrophe, he does not ask her to come back or even to acknowledge him. In a way, the poem acts almost as a tragic redemption arc for H.H. as he comes to understand his sins and—almost—repent for them, eventually getting what the reader cannot help but view as a just fate by the end of the poem. Above all else, the poem functions as an acknowledgment of reality—shocking for the reader after so much time spent in a world of delusion and fantasy.

The deft wielding of language in the maniac’s masterpiece cements

in readers' minds the surety that Humbert has an impressive grasp of literary composition. However, we must not forget that H.H. is not the true author of this piece—such an honor goes to Vladimir Nabokov. In his brief essay “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*,” Nabokov laments his

private tragedy...that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way. (316–317)

Nabokov feels that his grasp of English is subpar—and yet he wrote the maniac's masterpiece, the tripping anapests, the perfect punctuation—“(I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze, / I cannot get out, said the starling)” (255), where the parentheses function as a type of enclosure, emphasizing the feeling of entrapment. The poem functions in two ways as a commentary of Nabokov's relationship with English-language literature. The first is to emphasize his ability to use and master language as a tool for his own purposes; he is able to manipulate language in order to express desire, grief, responsibility, and reality. When using language to reflect things as they are—even in the context of fiction—Nabokov feels able to use English. This tension between the real and the fantastic is a common theme in *Lolita*: Brent Harold says, “This central reality is an artist's painful discovery of his dependence on and vulnerability to his subject, a life beyond self and beyond art” (72). In other words, though the artist—whether Humbert or Nabokov—may believe himself to be in charge of his creation, he ultimately must surrender to the laws that dictate his art—the laws of reality. Harold goes on to describe “the transcendence of the dichotomy of art and life,” saying, “*Lolita* shows that a book cannot be about truly valuable art unless it is also about real life.” This is especially applicable to the maniac's masterpiece; what is perhaps Humbert/Nabokov's greatest literary achievement throughout the book is only successful because it acknowledges the central reality of Humbert's story: his dehumanization of Dolores; his longing and desire for Dolores; his crime against Dolores; that he is at fault for this crime.

The triumph of the maniac's masterpiece and its acknowledgement of central truths is in stark contrast to the ridiculous, disastrous death sentence poem. The poem begins in strict iambic meter, which is nearly as boring and contrived as the words themselves, but gradually devolves into an unnamable crime against meter. The rhyme scheme simply does not exist—or it does, in an ABCBDEFGHIJAKLMCNOPQRAASTUOVWDXDYS pattern. The diction is disastrous—repetitive of the least important sentiments and nearly unintelligible in the parts that clearly hold weight. The first four lines read like a bad Twitter meme ahead of its time:



Because you took advantage of a sinner  
because you took advantage  
because you took  
because you took advantage of my disadvantage... (299)

The odd erotic imagery and symbolism—"erector sets" and "ripping his flavid toga and at dawn / leaving the hog to roll upon his new discomfort" (300)—is not so much disturbing or even particularly striking as it is just odd. "The awfulness of love and violets" is opaque at best. Strangest of all, this mockery of language only names its object—Dolores Haze—once: "a litter of Loli-tas" (300). It does not name its addressee at all except in the single pronoun "you"—which is particularly odd, considering that Quilty, the "you" in question, reads it aloud *to Humbert*, seemingly changing the pronoun's object. This is not a death sentence: it is simply the delirious ramblings of someone attempting to enact vengeance on himself through the destruction of another—another he cannot even pin the blame on long enough to name.

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Although the tragic state of the death sentence poem is clearly intentional, we can see it as a metaphor for Nabokov's self-perceived inefficacy when working with English—specifically, his inability to wrestle English into submission in order to tell outright falsehoods. Within the world of story, fiction and falsity are not the same. Like Tim O'Brien's concept of "story-truth," we must see the truth as a fluid concept which does not stick merely to a representation of absolute reality, but rather, to the most equal impression thereof. Harold describes the death sentence as such: "If Humbert becomes, in his love, temporarily too sentimental to produce art at all, Quilty is too professional to produce the kind of art that *Lolita* represents and advocates" (81). In other words, Harold is arguing that sentimentality is both the basis and the downfall of "true" art—that there is a perfect balance to be achieved in order to create the conditions necessary for art-making. I cannot help but disagree. We do not directly see Quilty's art—we do not know its quality. We know that, concerning Dolly, it is primarily pornographic—a performance—rather than the act of creation that Humbert attempts. While Humbert may be overcome with sentimentality, and Quilty may remain aloof, we can hardly call the latter professional—he is an intoxicated clown play-acting at life—making existence into its own performance until he cannot even pick out the truth of his own morbid end. He is not professional; he is in a perpetual state of a suspension of disbelief. I would propose that, rather than the quality of art hinging on the level of sentiment behind it, Nabokov's ultimate point in the failure of this poem is rather that the concept of truth must be central to the creation of art. While the maniac's masterpiece acknowledges every central truth of the book, the death sentence denies it—it denies Humbert's culpability by blaming Quilty and McFate for the travesties that occur within the book; it denies Dolly's agency by viewing her as an object to be stolen or



returned; it paints H.H. as a passive victim. And indeed, while an “infinitely docile” (317) language—a language its author has been molding for his purposes since first he learned to speak—may be bent into falsehood, a language which has not yet been tamed into fluency—a language which still possesses agency and “a garden and a twilight and a palace gate—dim and adorable regions that happen[s] to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden” to the author (284)—simply refuses to do.

If we take central truth as the necessary prerequisite for art according to Nabokov—as the exquisite maniac’s masterpiece acknowledges its story-truth and the limping disaster that is the death sentence denies its reality as vehemently as Quilty denies his—then we see that the relationship dynamic between H.H. and Dolores, far from a simple story about abuse, is in fact a reflection of Nabokov’s relationship with the English language. In “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*,” Nabokov describes his relationship to English, saying, “After Olympia Press, in Paris, published the book, an American critic suggested that *Lolita* was the record of my love affair with the romantic novel. The substitution ‘English language’ for ‘romantic novel’ would make this elegant formula more correct” (316). Perhaps, despite Nabokov’s proclaimed distance from H.H., he found English to be a tempting nymphet—a lovely little being he wanted, needed, to shape into his own creation. But he found that English, like *Lolita*, had its own agency and would not submit the way Russian—Anabel—was so willing to do. H.H. and Nabokov alike wanted to force the object of their affections into submission, mold it and shape it in their own image. While Humbert failed because he pushed too hard, Nabokov learned to compromise with the object of his seduction: English was willing to cooperate, as long as Nabokov told the story-truth. Where Dolores was an unwilling victim, English consented but kept her standards high, allowing for the great literary triumph that is *Lolita*.

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Alexis Jas

THE USE OF ANNOTATIONS IN JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

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Annotations in literature provide context and explanations for information in novels and other writings, which seems invaluable to the reader's ability to completely appreciate it. Annotators have different styles of annotations, some being more helpful than others, a perfect example being David M. Shapard's annotations in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. His *Annotated Northanger Abbey* provides annotations on the entire right side of the page, so that the reader could not possibly want for background information, literary analysis, or historical context. Despite the intrusiveness of annotations, they are a good way for readers to delve into the mind and lifestyle of the writer—to inhabit the work the way literature is, arguably, meant to be inhabited.

Yet not all annotations can be categorized as either helpful or inessential; they are a topic of slight debate within academics. James West III presents the question on every annotator's mind: "Does one engage in literary interpretation, pointing out how references and allusions fit and function in the stories, or does one give only the facts?" (West III 2). Certain readers, and definitely some other writers, annotators, or publishers, may greatly prefer factual annotations to interpretive ones—they want to know exactly the definition of a certain term that Jane Austen uses in her novels, but anything besides definitions is unnecessary. Yet only presenting facts ignores the possible need for further interpretation of the work's ideas. If an annotator *does* choose to delve into the territory of literary analysis and explanation, then they run the risk of overexplaining and distracting the reader. Annotations are positive because of the space they provide for definitions and explanations, as long as neither are overdone to the point of distraction or assuming the reader could not figure it out otherwise. Readers should still be able to draw their own connections in a novel without needing an annotator to explain everything to them.

Annotations can, however, go beyond definitions or analysis to provide historical context for the work or the writer. These historical annotations can greatly enhance the readers ability to inhabit the novel, which Michael Edson argues is true. He states that "footnotes . . . call attention to historical allusions and in turn shape the way audiences read Juvenal," (Edson 1). For Juvenal's writing at least, the annotations provide information that alters, even slightly, the meaning of the work itself within the translator's context. Thereby creating a space for the reader to understand the text from a new point of view. For with the annotations, readers not only understand Juvenal's arguments, they understand why those arguments are important in the first

place. Readers of annotated works will understand more of what is written between the lines, and perhaps begin to realize why the writer wrote that particular piece in the first place. These kinds of annotations are necessary for accompanying a piece of writing meant to sustain itself over decades, which is ultimately determined by how well a reader can relate to it, understand it, and inhabit it.

So with that, what are we to make of Shapard's annotations in *The Annotated Northanger Abbey*? After reading *The Annotated Pride and Prejudice*, annotated by Shapard, William Grimes, in his article "You've Read the Novels (Now Read the Footnotes)," finds that "reanimating the details does . . . help explain character and motivation" (Grimes). Shapard's annotations do convey a certain explanatory quality about nearly every sarcastic remark, every social norm, and every shrub, and for those who have read Austen before, it is helpful to see what we got right on the first read—as if we have our own book club with Shapard through his annotations (something he would thoroughly enjoy). However, Shapard's annotations are quite intrusive and are not for those reading Austen for the first time. His presentation of cultural and time period facts *are* interesting and important if the goal is to read Austen while understanding her societal context, but his explanation of plot, characters, and themes borders on spoiling Austen's twists for readers. If a reader truly inhabits a work, it will be because they are empathetically drawn to certain characters and ideas, not because each detail is emphatically explained. Annotations definitely help provide context for such empathy, yet if they over-explain plot points, the novel can begin to feel more rigid and less relatable. Because of this, Grimes' perspective is important if one has already read the novel once or twice, and wants to understand more details surrounding its importance, rather than rely on initial emotional empathy for understanding characters and their motivations.

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Yet that is not to say that Shapard's annotations are imprecise, for he goes into great detail elsewhere based on seemingly unimportant exclamations from some of Austen's characters. At one point during *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine and Henry have a conversation in which Henry asks Catherine to "Remember the country and the age in which [they] live," (Austen 404). Without an annotation, the reader would not really grasp what Henry is referring to—what do they need to be remembering about their country and their society? Thankfully, Shapard annotates that "the ascendance of Britain to a position of economic and political primacy, the advancement of education and learning, and new technical improvements were all among the factors cited by those affirming the superiority of the era" (Shapard 405). The average reader in the twenty-first century would not have known any of that about the eighteenth century. We might have overlooked Henry's and Catherine's exchange, but with the annotation we can understand that there *is* something at stake for these characters; there *are* things for which they are passionate about, namely their whole society and way of life. They pride themselves on

who they are and their identity, much like all of us do to other extents. Even Catherine's indifference to aligning herself with society, evident throughout the novel, is reiterated here, providing further insight into both characters and what is important to them. Reading Shapard's annotation provides not only historical context, but an opportunity for readers to connect their own societal values to those within *Northanger Abbey*—readers can now more fully inhabit the novel, alongside its motivated, opinionated, and relatable characters.

Yet some of Shapard's annotations are not so valuable—you could even say some are useless. An example of this is when Catherine identifies a woman with “white beads round her head” (Austen 118). Shapard's annotation simply states, “Women sometimes wore jewelry on their heads,” with a drawing of a woman with beads arranged on her head to illustrate (Shapard 119). Whether or not women wore jewelry on their heads is not a crucial piece of information that greatly adds to a reader's ability to inhabit *Northanger Abbey*, understand the time period, or relate to a character. Many of Shapard's other annotations do a much better job of explaining eighteenth century society in a way that expands upon ideas and characters in the novel. Yet providing a brief statement that women wore jewelry on their heads—and being attached to a sentence which says nearly exactly that—does nothing to contribute to the novel and is only a distraction for the reader, it seems. Perhaps Shapard could have included information as to why women wearing jewelry was an identifiable cultural norm, especially if the goal is (and perhaps should be) to offer annotations that assist readers in inhabiting a work and relating to its characters.

Shapard's edition of *Northanger Abbey* is only five years old, and presents an all-encompassing assortment of annotations. His incorporation of historical context, character analysis, and plot explanation, point to the expanding world of annotations which is taking hold of, not just literature, but television, movies, and music. In fact, Spotify recently introduced Behind the Music by Genius on certain popular songs, which provides context for the singer's or band's writing process, or offers fun facts about the song itself. A notable example is on Amy Winehouse's song “Back to Black.” When Winehouse sings, “Me and my head high / And my tears dry / Get on without my guy,” Genius annotates that “Winehouse liked this phrase [tears dry]—there's also a song on *Back to Black* called “Tears Dry on Their Own” (Amy Winehouse). And later, Genius annotates that “after Winehouse died of alcohol poisoning . . . [Blake] Fielder-Civil said, ‘I'm beyond inconsolable. My tears won't dry,’” (Amy Winehouse). To see the connections between Winehouse's lyrics and expressions to the reaction of her ex-husband (who “Back to Black” is about) through annotations provides listeners with an entirely more personal listening experience. The annotations change the song from being solely about post-breakup depression to providing a picture of a relatable, broken woman.

So if the point of annotations are to create an empathetic space for readers and listeners alike to inhabit, then it seems like they tend to accomplish that goal in our modern day, which is perhaps most important. Without a doubt it seems that annotations, in the next ten years or so, will become more inclusive of societal contexts, especially as we live now in a tumultuous world—full of significant phenomena, like politics or culture shifts worldwide, that future generations will learn about through annotations. Not solely through annotations, of course, but plenty of what our generation writes or creates could use annotations to convey accurate meaning to future consumers of media—annotations are especially helpful in this sense. Yet once annotations border on redundant, they are not as necessary or useful. When used correctly, like how Shapard (generally) uses them, and how Spotify uses them, annotations can be immensely helpful for those wishing to inhabit a work of literature, or a song, and to understand life itself from all different perspectives and worldviews.

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Anne Carrica

MOMENTS THAT MATTER: NEVER SAYING ANYTHING

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As a sophomore in high school, the day after Christmas, on the way to my doctor's appointment, my mom was rear-ended. Resulting in a concussion, she did not move from the living room chair for three months. When she was finally able to move, she was miserable and depressed. I spent the majority of my sophomore and junior year of high school convinced that my parents were going to get a divorce. It was the first time in my life that my mom seemed helpless and in desperate need of help. These events drastically changed my relationship with mother. I became a mini adult for the family, and took up a lot of responsibilities of a parental role. I became the daughter who was always fine, always happy, and who never needed anything. I saw how much my parents had already given and did not want to be the one to need anything else. I repressed many of my thoughts and feelings to save my parents, my mom, from having to worry about me.

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*Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng follows the lives of a family built on repression, secrets, and high expectations, following the death of their daughter, sister, named Lydia. Lydia felt innumerable pressures from her family (her parents in particular), society and herself. Her life was drastically affected by her mother's nine-week abandonment of the family to pursue her degree. Marilyn (Lydia's mother) following the failure of getting her degree pins all of her hopes and dreams on Lydia. Lydia is suffocated by the expectations placed on her by others. The family never talking, or sharing their wants and dreams allows the expectations to drown Lydia.

The familial pressure suffocating the second sibling is also present in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "Only Goodness," with Rahul. In "Only Goodness," Rahul is the younger brother in a family of four. He is the golden child; the family expects him to do well academically, socially, and eventually professionally. Rahul is the second child, just like Lydia.

Sudha, Rahul's sister, is not the center of attention ever, even though she is very accomplished academically. Their parents always placed Rahul above Sudha and the narrator notes that, "Sudha had slipped through the cracks, but she was determined that her little brother should leave his mark as a child of America" (136). Sudha was the buffer for Rahul to the family. Everything that she did was ignored or not discussed, but Rahul was what the family pegged their success on. Sudha never expresses her frustration with this (if she even has any), instead she views herself as competent. She internalizes the familial focus on Rahul saying, "competence: this was the trait that fundamentally defined her" (129). Sudha could only see herself as being compe-



tent, not smart or accomplished because no one had ever praised her for what she achieved. They took what Sudha did for granted.

Similarly, Nath and all his accomplishments are brushed aside in order for the focus to be on Lydia. Nath is a good student and loves what he is pursuing: to be an astronaut. Yet, when he is accepted to Harvard his dad can only say, “not bad” (170). Nath’s accomplishments are dimmed in comparison by Lydia. Nath never expresses or says anything about always being pushed aside. He instead acts as a buffer for all the pressure that Lydia faces. Nath and Lydia never voice what is happening, but instead just know what each other is thinking when it comes to the pressures from their parents.

When Nath finally does act to express his feelings, he does so by not talking. Lydia and Nath lose their ability to understand what the other is saying, and they refuse to speak. It is during this time that Nath asks Lydia to smile for a picture. As Nath takes the picture of her, “she stared straight into the black eye of the camera, refusing to smile, even the slightest bend in her lips, even after she heard the shutter click” (181). It is the first time that Lydia does not simply say yes and do what she is asked, but rather refuses to smile thus, showing how she truly feels for the first time to someone else. However, even this act is not enough. When searching for a picture to give the police when the family thought she was missing, James refuses to use the one Nath took and instead to find one with Lydia smiling. No one saw the truth, the reality in the picture that Nath took. The only person to notice that Lydia’s smiles were ever faked was Hannah. Following Lydia’s birthday dinner, “Lydia forced herself to smile... but only Hanna spotted its fakeness” (238). Hannah is so ignored by the rest of the family that she has no one to share her thoughts with. Hannah is only ever able to witness things happening around her and to put the pieces of what she knows together on her own. This lack of communication alienates Lydia even further from the family.

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Lydia could not share anything with anyone, not even within her journals. Every year Marilyn bought Lydia a journal but even when “something important had occurred, something that she ought to write down... she did not know how to explain what had happened, how everything had changed in just one day, how someone she loved so dearly could be there one minute, and the next minute: gone” (101). Marilyn leaving was the most defining event of Lydia’s life. It is what led Lydia to make endless, silent promises to her mother, believing it was the only way to keep her there. Lydia’s inability to sort through her thoughts, so much so that she was unable to write anything shows how far the family silence affected her.

It is only moments before her death that Lydia wants to open up to her family. As Lydia sat on the lake she thought:

It was not too late. There on the dock, Lydia made a new set of promises, this time to herself. She will begin again... Feet planted firmly on nothing, Lydia – so long enthralled by the dreams of

others – could not yet imagine what that might be, but suddenly the universe glittered with possibilities. (274-275)

Finally able to do what she never had before, open up to herself, Lydia wanted to change the narrative of silence within her family. Wanting to “begin again” suggests that Lydia finally regrets having always said yes. She sees a different future from the one she had always just agreed to. Yet, she has no ground beneath her: she has nothing to stand on. By being “enthralled” by everyone else’s dreams for so long, she has no dreams of her own. Not only is she lacking a dream, she is weighed down by the dreams of her family. The expectations placed on her are too much and pull her under water. The family having expected so much from her for so long could be part of her reasoning that she could swim to the shore on her own. Having always had high expectations placed on her, she does not know how to set reasonable expectations on herself, leading her to drown.

Just as Lydia want to reconnect with her family so too does Rahul. In the end of the story, Rahul tries to reconnect with his sister and her new family (she is now married and has a son), but it ends tragically as in a drunken relapse, he endangers his nephew. What partially enables Rahul to place Neel (Sudha’s son) in danger is that Sudha never told Roger (her husband) about Rahul’s addiction to alcohol. Upon finding Neel alone and Rahul passed out Sudha sobs to Roger saying, “I’m sorry. I should have told you... how eventually [drinking] was no longer a game for him but a way of life, a way of life that had removed him from her family and ruined him” (171). The refusal to acknowledge Rahul’s problem and failure to discuss it, places Sudha and Rahul in dangerous situations Rahul and Sudha fail to communicate that while Rahul is doing better, he is still an alcoholic. It was a term that is never mentioned in the short story, but it is what Rahul becomes.

Not being able to voice problems is what led to the failed rebirths of Lydia and Rahul. Both Lydia and Rahul are isolated by their families’ refusal to discuss and voice their feelings and concerns. Instead they are both forced to deal and work through their problems on their own. By having such high expectations and assumptions for their grand futures, they were never given the option to fail. Neither was given the option to seek a different path. While both attempted to find a new way, on their own it became impossible and deadly. Had any members of either of their families’ reached out and taken the first step to discussing all that they had left unsaid, both of their stories would be drastically different. While Sudha and Nath tried, both ultimately are confined to silence by the pressures that are placed on them as well. Sudha is expected to be the compliant and competent older sister. Nath is expected to do well and to never stand out. Both are expected to simply support their siblings, but it is not enough.

In my own life, I reached a breaking point around my twenty-first birthday. I realized I was unhappy (dangerously so) and that change needed to

happen. I was lucky that my older sibling was free of confines of expectation; he had reached the point in his life where he was on track for his career and that our age difference never put us in competition with one another. I am fortunate enough to have a family that was and is receptive to everything I had repressed in the past. Rather than refusing to talk I was able to open up and receive the help and care that I needed to have a successful rebirth. I am forever grateful for my family. The stories of Lydia and Rahul scare me; I understand how easy it can be to fall so far away into isolation. I know how hard it can be to break the standstill of silence.

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## EFFECTS OF VARYING ALIGNMENT ON JOINT LOADING DURING YOGA

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### INTRODUCTION

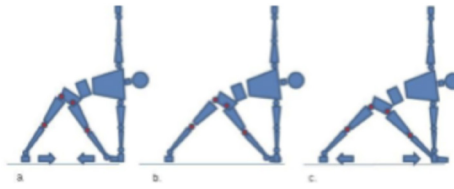
The practice of yoga has become increasingly popular worldwide. However, as with any physical activity, inherent injury risks exist. Injury while practicing yoga is common and has been documented in literature worldwide<sup>1-4</sup>. Indeed, joints are often stressed to the point of injury during yoga, with the knee and hip accounting for approximately 30% of sustained body injuries<sup>1,3</sup>. These statistics justify a crucial need for yoga injury prevention. Unfortunately, little is known about how yoga postures load the limbs and joints, let alone mechanisms of yoga injuries, and little to no evidence-based recommendations for injury prevention currently exist.

The Triangle pose has been identified as a commonly practiced posture with a higher incidence of injury to the knee and hip joints<sup>2-3</sup>. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to establish joint loading metrics for the Triangle pose and to identify how systematic adjustments to this posture may alter loading in the lower extremity joints. This information could function as a guideline for practitioners and instructors, by providing objective evidence for recommending adjustments to alter loading as desired. We hypothesized that a smaller foot-to-foot distance would decrease loading forces in the ankle, knee, and hip joints.

[53]

### METHODS

Five yoga practitioners of varying yoga expertise (4F, 1M; ) volunteered to participate in this study, which consisted of performing the Triangle pose twice to both the left and right sides in each of the following conditions: self-selected stance width—determined by taking the average of three stances selected by the subject from the medial aspect of the trailing foot to the heel of the leading foot—and  $\pm 10\%$ ,  $\pm 20\%$ , and  $\pm 30\%$  of self-selected stance width, presented in random order. These conditions are exemplified in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Depiction of triangle pose conditions that are narrower than self-selected width from left to right respectively. -selected width, at self-selected width, and wider than self.*

Thirty-eight markers were placed on each participant; tracking markers were placed on the trunk, pelvis, and bilaterally on the thighs, shanks, and feet to define the body segments and create a dynamic 3Dlinked rigid body segment model.

A motion capture system (NDI, Waterloo, ON, Canada) captured kinematic data from the markers at 100Hz, while an instrumented treadmill (Bertec, Columbus, OH) captured ground reaction forces at 1000Hz.

[54]

Ankle, knee, and hip joint reaction forces, captured while the subjects were holding the triangle pose, were each calculated via Visual 3D in the X (mediolateral), Y (anteroposterior), and Z (vertical) directions bilaterally for both leftwards and rightwards stances. The averages and standard deviations of the left and right legs in both the leftwards and rightwards stances between subjects were plotted, and  $R^2$  values for each linear trend were included.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For both the ankle and the knee there was a positive trend in the mediolateral axis and negative trends in the anteroposterior and vertical axes. For the hip joint there was a negative trend in the mediolateral and vertical axes and a positive trend in the anteroposterior axis of the forward leg but a negative trend in the anteroposterior axis of the rear leg. Figure 2 exemplifies these trends in the anteroposterior axis for all three joints.

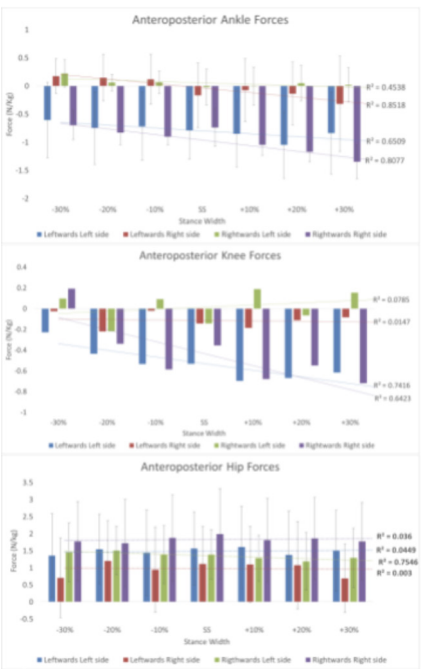


Figure 2: Average ankle, knee, and hip joint reaction forces in the anteroposterior axis for each stance width condition. Positive values indicate anterior forces whereas negative values indicate posterior forces.

[55]

These results displayed trends that were consistent for most directions (anteroposteriorly, mediolaterally, and vertically), and bilaterally. The large standard deviations and few inconsistent trends could be due to the small subject group size. Each subject also had a different self-selected stance width with vastly different background experience in yoga, which may have influenced the data.

## CONCLUSIONS

The noted trends indicate that as stance width increases, the magnitude of joint reaction forces in the ankle and knee are increasing medially, posteriorly, and downward. In the hip joint, the magnitudes of the reaction forces are increasing laterally and downward in both legs, increasing anteriorly in the forward leg, and decreasing anteriorly in the rear leg.

This collected data supports the hypothesis that a smaller foot-to-foot distance decreases loading forces in the ankle, knee, and hip joints. Therefore, practitioners and instructors may consider narrowing stance width in the Triangle pose to decrease the effects of loading forces on these commonly

injured joints for beginners, at-risk populations, and practitioners recovering from injury.

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