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FILM JOURNAL

30TH ANNIVERSARY LOST/FOUND ISSUE!!

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letter from the editor

Hi there, before you dive into this year's journal why don't you pause and take a breath with me for a minute. EyeCandy Film Journal is UC Santa Cruz's one and only student run film and media criticism publication, and it has been amazing to serve as its Editor-in-Chief this year. So, if you wouldn't mind indulging me, let's reflect a bit.

To say it's been an eventful year in EyeCandy's history would be a serious understatement. I don't know who is reading this or when, but just as a brief refresher let me run through a few of the challenges the EyeCandy staff has gone through to put out this journal for you all. We began the year at constant risk of wildfire and county-wide power outages. We quickly moved into navigating around an intense labor strike on campus that made us transform the way we function as undergraduates and educators. Then by the time we adjusted to that, we got hit with a worldwide pandemic.

Now, all that sounds pretty terrible. It is. I'm not going to try and diminish how difficult it is to change and adapt to continually worsening situations. I wanted to highlight the circumstances in which this journal was created because, despite everything I've mentioned, this team rallied and labored to make sure that the 2020 issue of EyeCandy got made; and not only got made but is a phenomenal piece of media criticism. The level of dedication, creativity, and flexibility this team has shown impresses me still.

As you read and enjoy this year's issue, I hope that you consider the role of the media in your life, especially in trying times. Be critical of the media you love, as well as the media you hate. Think about all the media you have lost, found, and have yet to discover. We hope you take the analysis presented in this journal as a prompt to reconsider your own relationship to the films, TV, music and more you consume. Most of all we hope you enjoy every word, design, and image that our tenacious staff have put together.

con mucho orgullo,
Ben

Editor-in-Chief 2019-2020

Fantasy, Empowerment, and Trauma in Children's Literature

By Keely Gwynne

When I was a kid, I read a lot of stuff I probably shouldn't have. From a novel about a serial killer targeting pre-pubescent girls to a post-apocalyptic manga series about a bounty-hunting cyborg, what I read was not always "age-appropriate." But my obsession with these stories did not come out of nowhere: I can easily trace my dark tastes back to the children's books that nearly every twenty-something like me grew up reading. *Matilda, Charlotte's Web, The Chronicles of Narnia, Coraline, Warrior Cats, Holes, A Wrinkle In Time, Goosebumps,* and *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* are just a few of the books that are fondly brought up in conversations with friends about childhood nostalgia and stories that invoked intense emotional responses.

I still remember the first book that ever made me cry. I had just finished reading *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane,* a children's book following a sentient toy rabbit's adventures with various different owners.[1] The rabbit, Edward Tulane, can only observe as each of his owners go through the motions of their lives, until he is eventually torn away to meet someone new. The story rapidly escalates when Edward's new owner is a terminally ill girl, who tragically dies with only Edward to comfort her. Years later, Edward gets his happy ending when he is reunited with his original owner, but that one scene where Edward helplessly watches as a little girl's life fade away has forever left an impression in my mind.

Edward Tulane was the first time I read a story that openly confronted loss and death, and showed me that sometimes bad things happen that are irreversible, and it's ok to be sad, to mourn, and eventually move on. These are heavy themes for anyone, especially for children, but this breach in comfort is exactly what made the story so compelling. The author Kate DiCamillo offers an interpretation for the merit of her book, stating that, as a child, her friends read emotionally dark and complex books because they "knew that a terrible thing was going to happen, and I also knew that it was going to be okay somehow. I thought that I couldn't bear it, but then when I read it again, it was all so beautiful. And I found out that I could bear it...That was what I needed to hear."[2] This perfectly describes my experience with the book, which I have continued to read over the years as both a compelling narrative and bittersweet reminder of life's hardships.

This story has stuck with me for over a decade, which may be odd considering how "inappropriate" it may be regarded by adults for the age group associated with it. So why am I still obsessed with this story? One answer is that the bittersweet narrative is reinforced by Edward's surprisingly complex character development. In the beginning, Edward is not immediately lovable. He is selfish and lacks empathy, disdainful of others for lacking his own material sophistication. Only when he is separated from his original owner does he experience fear and depression, discover that other lives besides his matter, and that he has a significant impact on others just by existing. Reading about characters who are not appreciated by the people around them but are silently and intensely loved by a toy rabbit is surprisingly moving— even more heartbreaking when Edward is forced to part ways. While *Edward Tulane* is less well-known and more specific to my childhood, similar themes can be found in children's books today such as *Charlotte's Web, The Giving Tree,* and *Bridge To Terabithia,* all of which tackle common themes of love, loss, and death that focus on the story's emotional impact of the story rather than the reader's comfort.

Why did these dark stories entrance us as children? And why did they resonate with us so much that we can now rely on a constant stream of movies, tv shows, and even musical adaptations of the books that shaped our childhoods? After all, many of the stories I listed are some of the most frequently suppressed books in America. Concerned parents worried about violence and sexual themes, as well as applying the general catch-all term "unsuited for age group,"[3] often demand these books be removed from school shelves. They may have a right to be worried. Fairy tales such as "Snow White," "Rapunzel," and "Cinderella" often depict characters enduring violent and abusive home lives, Roald Dahl often depicts children fighting against both corrupt adults and evil monsters, and some of the vignettes from *Scary Stories* still haunt me to this day. But this dark content didn't matter to kids like me. However, I was completely oblivious to the ongoing debate of what was appropriate for me, instead reading whatever I could get my hands on and being fascinated by macabre narratives where heroes had to fight their worst nightmares to achieve their happy ending. So how can a children's book meant for and enjoyed by children be subversive, unless we have expectations of what children and children's books are supposed to be? These dueling concepts of childhood purity versus darker, fantastical narratives preferred by children themselves can be traced to the invention of children's literature as a genre.

Dark content in children's literature emerged in folk tales such as "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," "Rapunzel," "Snow White," and "Little Red Riding Hood" which existed for centuries before being published as fairy tales, first in 1697's *Tales of Mother Goose* and then in 1812 by the Brothers Grimm. These stories often depict characters surviving abusive home lives or fighting off violent attacks by strangers, sometimes with no clear moral or happy ending, but became associated with children because of their archetypical, simple, and straightforward storytelling structure. In between these two time frames, children's literature became a sustainable and commercial success because of publisher John Newbury's efforts in the 18th century. However, while dark fairytales were what became modern children's classics, Newbury absorbed common philosophy of the time that emphasized the concept of children needing "some easy pleasant book, suited to his capacity" that were focused on mo-

> "Dahl communicates clear messages advocating for children's autonomy, the joys of reading (especially what kids are not "supposed" to read), and condemnation of adults who are systemically allowed to hurt and control children."

rality and teaching children right from wrong.[4]

The original fairy tales, especially those of the Brothers Grimm, contain a surprising amount of violence that nonetheless has the power to capture children's imaginations. For example, the Queen in "Snow White" is originally her mother,

and wishes to eat the girl's heart as payback for her beauty; Cinderella's stepsisters cut off parts of their feet to fit into glass slippers; the Frog turns into a prince after the princess hurls him against the wall; and in lesser-known stories such as "The Robber Bridegroom," a woman is killed, dismembered, and prepared to be eaten. Interestingly enough, these versions of the stories were the result of the Brothers Grimm restraining and censoring the original tales sexual content, while amping up the violence. While these additions may seem cruel, meaningless, and inappropriate, there is merit in the fact these fairy tales do not shy away from depicting the worst aspects of reality, even when the more dark and violent content is toned down. But the most fascinating aspect of fairy tales is children's response to them. Children continuously search for and enjoy these stories. Their reasons range from desiring an escape from the real world to an enjoyment of reading the "twisted and bizarre," clearly establishing children's ability

> "Matilda, James, Charlie, and Dahl's countless other characters reject the idea that childhood means innocence, powerlessness, and ignorance. They take an active role to overcome the traumatic events, promising to readers that any suffering they face is not an insurmountable obstacle but something that can be fought and defeated at any age."

to distinguish dark fantasy from reality, and a desire for fantastical narrative content beyond moral lessons.[5] But there is a twisted sense of morality throughout the stories, which are present in the vi-

olence against villains. Cinderella's stepsisters are blinded by birds, Snow White's mother is forced to dance to her death, and the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood" is killed when his stomach is filled with stones. Good does, sometimes, triumph over evil.

Despite the violence present in fairy tales, there is often an underlying message of hope through survival of traumatic scenarios. In fairy tales such as "Cinderella" or "Snow White," characters (primarily the female ones, unfortunately) are largely passive in their roles. Their existence propels the drama but has no real impact on how the story progresses. Instead, the characters are protected by fairy godmothers, princes, talking animals, and other helpers whose fantastical existences promise a magical resolution to the end of a tale steeped in death and violence. This use of fantasy assistance implies that innocent people suffer and may not be able to protect themselves, but that hope is still possible in overwhelming times. Fairy tales ultimately explore the concept that "struggl[ing] against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable... but if one ... steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious... morality is not the issue in these tales but rather assurance that one can succeed."[6] Even when the main characters are passive, their endurance in the face of hardship promises readers that any suffering they face is a temporary obstacle they can recover from.

A modern children's author who perfectly embodies and expands upon this concept of success in the face of hardship is Roald Dahl. Dahl's stories such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda* take a sharp turn from fairy tales of the past by incorporating humor and agency into his child characters, who use their wits or magical powers to fight against evil adults. But, when one decides to look below the surface level, most of his stories have morals beyond simply "good triumphs over evil." For example, *Matilda* is about a girl developing magic powers to fight against her cruel parents and abusive headmistress.[7] *Matilda* has a similar structure to a fairytale such as "Cinderella." A brilliant girl is controlled and emotionally abused

by her guardians, and is able to escape with the use of magic. Unlike Cinderella, Matilda is her own fairy godmother who directly fights adult oppression with her own power. Using a literal child-superhuman as his mouthpiece, Dahl communicates clear messages advocating for children's autonomy, the joys of reading (especially what kids are not "supposed" to read), and condemnation of adults who are systemically allowed to hurt and control children.

Other Dahl books expand on themes of child empowerment. For example, the Cinderella-esque *James and the Giant Peach*,[8] in which the titular character is regularly abused by his aunts until a giant peach grows in his backyard, kills his aunts through a series of adventures with magical creatures, and flies to New York City. Another novel, *The Witches*, is about an orphan boy who defeats the titular witches but is forever turned into a mouse. The iconic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* rewards Charlie's good behavior while severely punishing his naughty peers. Dahl addresses family abuse, a child's desire to protect their friends, and that danger can lurk behind any corner. Critics have questioned whether "such a zestful exploitation of childish instincts for hate and revenge, prejudice and violence, be as innocent as it appears,"[9] but such criticism misses the point of the stories. Matilda, James, Charlie, and Dahl's countless other characters reject the idea that childhood means innocence, powerlessness, and ignorance. They take an active role to overcome the traumatic events, promising to readers that any suffering they face is not an insurmountable obstacle but something that can be fought and defeated at any age.

A final point of discussion is the perspective of the authors themselves. Despite my analysis, authors like Dahl have different motivations for writing beyond a message regarding children and empowerment. Roald Dahl simply insisted children's books should require "interesting plots" that "[teach] children the use of words, the joy of playing with language,"[10] emphasizing not a moral lesson but a genuine enjoyment of the text. I found this to be a common theme when researching successful children's authors: they care less about

morality or audience identity and more about how the actual story engages readers. Kate DiCamillo, for example, did not seem to write *Edward Tulane* to help children understand traumatic situations in life. In fact, DiCamillo never seems to write for children in the first place, stating "I feel like I'm a storyteller and I don't make the distinction on

whether I'm telling that story to an adult or a child."[11] DiCamillo's statement suggests an important and currently un-discussed link between the attraction of children's books and fairy tales- the language of the text itself. Every single story refrains from patronizing the reader. This is perfectly articulated by E.B. White, author of *Charlotte's Web*, who stated that "anyone who writes down to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down."[12] Perhaps this is why many of these stories are so popular, even among adults– they are intended to be blank slates with no moral or philosophical message beyond their narratives, to engage with a universal audience without assuming a lack of comprehension that would slow down the narrative by explaining morality. Readers like me pick up these books at pivotal moments of our development and attach emotional meaning along the way.

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane is still one of my favorite books, and it still makes me cry. As cheesy as this sounds, the book reminds me how powerful stories can be. The traumatic events in the story did not drive me away but kept me entranced. I kept reading the book because I desperately wanted to know what happened, how Edward survived, and what he would choose to do next, even if parts of the story made me feel sad. The book was an essential part of my childhood because it intrigued and challenged me with frighteningly new concepts about love, loss, and death, and inspired me to think more critically about the world around me. I began to explore other more mature books that may not have been what I was "supposed" to be reading, but became my most cherished memories.

In retrospect, all these stories have one theme in common: trauma. Characters in even the most fantastical children's narratives struggle to cope with oddly realistic and traumatic scenarios including abuse, the death of a loved one, and betrayal. This material which parents may be adamant on censoring is what makes the stories meaningful because the characters survive and overcome their hardships, proving that no matter what horrifying situation they encounter, there is always hope. These themes may seem too heavy, mature, or subversive for a younger audience, but they inspire an analytical approach to thinking about the world through compelling narratives. Fairy tales approach death and violence as frightening but temporary obstacles, children's authors such as Roald Dahl portray children actively conquering the forces that suppress them, and Kate DiCamillo's *Edward Tulane* uses the titular character as a representation for selfless love and a way to understand and overcome tragedy. Ultimately, dark children's literature uses trauma as a narrative tool and case study for the reader to both understand and overcome traumatic events in real life.

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Eyecandy

HELL IS A TEENAGE GIRL

ESSAY BY
ISABELLA BALBI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ASHLEY REASONER

The female is an object in horror culture: a scream queen, a slasher victim for the male antagonist to gut or sink his teeth into. It is nearly always a man behind a mask, or a creature of the night that while not outrightly human, possesses a Y chromosome nonetheless. The only thing scarier than a man? The God-forsaken teenage girl. The hyperemotionality, the budding sexuality, the grotesque inner anatomy. The Monstrous Feminine. Barbara Creed first gave form to the classic trope in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* conceptualizing it as the embodiment of "all that human society finds shocking, terrifying, horrific, and abject" about a woman.[1] It is no revelation that society is scared of girls; men have sworn that young women have been possessed by the devil since Eve created original sin and Salem was plagued by a plethora of witches. Since then, however, the fear of the monstrous feminine has adapted, manifested in cinematic images that associate menstruation, teen cliques, and female expressions of sexuality with the demonic and hellish. In looking at these expressions of our cultural taboos we can discover how our attitudes towards women have, and have not, adapted throughout nearly a century's worth of filmic works.
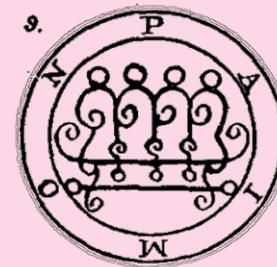
After all, there's no better reflection of society's fears than scary movies.

Consider why Regan MacNeil got possessed in *The Exorcist.* The 1973 horror classic sees the innocent pre-teen enter the throes of adolescence while simultaneously enduring demonic possession, synchronicity that is anything but coincidental. Along with the onset of her first period, in the original novel, Regan had started masturbating. The subsequent demonic invasion of her body can be seen as a reaction against puberty and a manifestation of the church's fear of female sexuality. This punishment is for Regan as much as it is for her mom Chris, a single parent and woman in the labor force who operates outside the structures of the nuclear family. The demon even makes sure to shame Chris about her defiance of societal norms during the iconic exorcism scene, exclaiming that "It is *you* who have done it! Yes, *you* with your career before anything, your career before your husband, before *her*..." using outright horror to play on the generational guilt of women who began to move into the workplace. Retaliation against this newfound independence comes with the onset of Regan's possession, as Chris is "put back in her place, forced by the narrative to adopt the role of the domestic mother" once more.[2] With traditional roles restored, Regan is soon cured, and the conventional family prevails; the audience has survived what is widely considered to be the scariest movie of all time, leaving us to ask—just why exactly are these two hours of terror so traumatizing? Creed insists that Regan's "monstrousness" stems from the film's use of aggressive and unladylike flaunting of bodily functions and fluids, from bile to feces. In multiple senses, the "horror emerges from the fact that the woman has broken her proper feminine role".[3] Regan's possession functions as an iteration of teenage rebellion, a resistance of "normality" that is subsequently unholy. With the release of sexuality and challenges to traditional authority figures being seen as downright satanic, the film reaffirms the "rightness" of the church, the conventional family, and the patriarchy. Above all, the film suggests that the female body and its functions are synonymous with evil, a common trend that can be seen throughout the rest of the century's cinema.

Take Stephen King's *Carrie* (1976), whose telekinetic abilities also develop post-period. Carrie's devoutly Christian mother floods the script with pious propaganda, emphasizing that menstruation is the result of sinful thoughts, further shaming the natural experience of puberty. Ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep offers perspectives on the larger implications of such a ritualistic transformation in his book *Rites of Passage,* in which he suggests that intense transitions like puberty can be defined in stages: separation, liminality, and incorporation. These steps feature a "separation from a previous world, preliminal rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world [of] postliminal rites".[4] It is in this sense that Gennep taps into the social implications of a process like puberty. Puberty, marked by biological transformation, is demonized as it represents collective fears about girls becoming women in society at large. *Carrie* is one of the many films that employs a physical symbol of puberty, like menstruation, as a metaphorical tool, using it to showcase what it means to transcend the innocence of youth and enter spaces as an adult. The fear of menstruation is the fear of girls becoming sexual beings, of having body autonomy and power, magnified on the silver screen for all to recoil at. It works both ways; the boys who cower at innocent girls becoming independent beings who might one day have sex with men who are not them, turn away from the footage with the same vehement disgust as the girls who hide tampons up their sleeves and call out of work due to "lady problems", not period cramps. In a world where girls are raised to cross their legs, chew with their mouths closed, and hide any sign of basic biological processes, puberty acts as a form of friendly fire, a betrayal by our own bodies. The climactic image of Carrie onstage doused in blood is such a chilling experience because it is a result of all this internalized shame—it's the fear of blood in the wrong place, usually spreading quietly on the back of pale jeans, amplified.

In a culture that views it as horrifying, young women are taught to fear their own biology so much that menstruation is referred to as "the Curse" in the 2001 teen werewolf flick *Ginger Snaps*, in which 16-year-old Ginger gets her first period and is immediately bitten by a snarling beast. Her transformation into a woman is analogous to her transformation into a monster, as monthly cycles, mood shifts, and body-altering changes transcend simple adolescence and become twofold. The attack can be read as the punishment for puberty, and "the perversion of the feminine nature itself".[5]

These commonalities can be seen as projections of society's view on menstruation as a marker of abjection and sexual difference between genders. Carol Clover considers the matter in *The Dread of Difference* in which she cites "menstrual blood" as a symbol standing "for the danger issuing from within identity" as "it threatens the relationship between sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference."[6] This irreconcilable difference is what generates the terror which is the monster within the feminine.

Beyond the biological basis for abjection, women in horror are also feared for their social roles. Mass media villanizes the communal relationships girls create with each other, recognizing the inherently formidable bonds and undeniable power of female collectives. Take the 1996 cult classic *The Craft,* in which a group of teenage misfits forms a coven to escape the torments of high school. Their individual battles for love, acceptance, and respect become feasible fights upon the arrival of their "fourth", a member who will complete their circle and allow them to summon the great powers of a god-like entity, Manon. Their once futile goals are made plausible through the completion of the circle—divided, they are schoolgirl loners, but together, they yield an absolute and epic power. The film taps into the primal American

fear of this female power, and what happens when women are alone together. Angelica Jade Bastién asserts:

"For many girls, witches are our first brush with any depiction of feminism...Whether they're unhinged old women cackling into the night sky or alluring vixens, witches teach us the glory and risk that comes with power for a woman. They give voice to the darker desires you're too young to name, and the anger swelling in your chest when the people in your orbit assume you lack the grit and intelligence necessary to make your desires a reality."[7]

Together the girls take on the pillars of the white male institution as they fight to comply with beauty standards, confront blatant racism, and challenge rape culture. When Nancy sends Chris hurtling to his death, she's the picturesque retaliation against a society that slips pills into girls' drinks and follows them home at night. It is at that moment that the film presents "a beguiling and fearsome portrait of female anger"—the revenge fantasy that men everywhere are fearful of.

The social bonds that hold together the teen coven in *The Craft* are the same that form the traumatism central to the plot of Ari Aster's *Hereditary*. This 2018 independent release introduces a version of the monstrous feminine outside the confines of teendom, reimagining the vision of an "unhinged old [woman]" that Bastién comments on. *Hereditary* delves into a narrative as old as Salem, presenting a family line polluted by a matriarchal cult—a twist that uses Christian demonology as a take on the classic witches coven. This reimagination paints the "women [of] the film [as] the architects of the downfall of the Graham family", playing on the "fears that the secretive rituals of women are always about evil". While the men in the film are "lost and vacuous", populating "the movie as accessories to a female-focused design,"[8] *Hereditary* ultimately functions as a treatise on the monstrous feminine, modeling stereotypes about that which makes women scary. The women in the Graham family may hold the power, but it is their genetics that carry the toxic family secret, the evil cancer that contaminates future generations. It is the women who uproot the very structure they are meant

to belong to—the family and the home. In this sense, feminine social roles work in conjunction with the abjection of the female form itself, as the cult also places supreme value on the male body. Despite being a coalition of women, the cult views themselves in subservience to their true leader, whoever acts as the embodiment of the spirit Paimon. The spirit can only inhabit a male form, as opposed to a female host who would be inherently impure and unsuitable. The female members of the Graham family are innately rejected as conventions about purity and physical merit prevail, making their female bodies defunct by default. The film shows viewers how the monstrous feminine evolves, demonstrating the manner in which the budding youth of the gals in *The Craft* can wither into the deranged Satanic fantasies of the women in the Graham family—the idea that women are crazy and evil, but especially in groups with social power.

Horror culture follows these scripts to such an extent that a violation of these expected roles is an inherent box office flop. Take the tragedy of the now revered feminist horror flick *Jennifer's Body* (2009). The film stars Megan Fox, who was arguably the apex of beauty and sexuality back in 2009. In the film, she is a succubus cheerleader who feeds on boys after having had her body defiled and sacrificed to Satan by the members of an all-male indie rock band. The plot is inherently feminist, starring two

female leads, written and directed by women, centered around a Satanic beauty queen dressed in pink, dolled up in lip gloss. Jennifer embraces her femininity, weaponizing it against men as a tool to be utilized rather than as a source of shame to be hidden. When Needy asks her how she is going to get alcohol, she replies nonchalantly that she will "just play Hello Titty with the bartender". When Needy threatens to call the police on her, she promptly reminds her that she has "got


the cops in [her] back pocket" because she is sleeping with a cadet. When she is impaled during the film's climax, she asks Needy if she has "got a tampon?" Jennifer repeatedly references her womanhood, talking proudly and openly about female sexuality and biology in a way that champions aspects of gender that most films would vilify. Her cannibalism works to serve her status as the school's It girl, not counter it. When she eats boys, her skin is glowing and her hair is shining. When she is hungry, her skin is dull and her hair is lifeless. Jennifer's "monstrousness"

is not something to be cowered at, but is rather a source of empowerment meant to be revered. The film's initial reception shows us why a work of this nature exists outside of the standard. Life imitated art after the film's production wrapped as the studio chose to sacrifice the artistic vision of the women behind the project in order to advertise to the male gaze. Describing the film's release as misunderstood would be an understatement; in addition to overtly sexualized taglines like "She's got a taste for bad boys" and posters featuring a scantily clad Fox as the tired school girl trope, the studio almost went as far as having her host an amateur porn site to promote the film.[9] The demoralizing ad campaign saw the subversive dark comedy marketed as a typical high school slasher flick that relied on Fox's body for sex appeal. The original target audience of teenage girls was traded for the broader male audience who were so unfortunately disappointed when the porno they paid to watch turned out to be a genre-defying feature that embraced female empowerment. Despite its recent status as a cult classic, the film initially grossed about $31.5 million worldwide against a $16 million budget and is now ranked 132 on IMDB's list of worst film openings by release scale.[10] *Jennifer's Body* made use of the monstrous feminine in a feminist light; it was a rebellion against the myriad of its predecessors that were written and shot from the male perspective.

It did not reflect the mass fear of women and their abjected bodies and, subsequently, it failed to appeal to a wide audience. This truth is perhaps the best reflection of the use of women in horror, and in a wider scope, women in society.

Everyone is comfortable watching the screen when it depicts a woman cowering in fear, stumbling during a chase scene, or shrieking into the camera. Film critics will label the female protagonist a scream queen or a final girl. But, once that girl bleeds from something other than a stab wound or screams out of rage rather than terror, she becomes something worse than inferior—monstrous. Pop culture teaches women that we should be ashamed of ourselves. Ashamed of bleeding, of breathing, of being. But our tampons, lipsticks, and friendship bracelets are our weapons against a world that abjects our very form. It is the culture of cliques like cults and blood-like guts that make prom queens more frightening than the fiery pits of any underworld. There is an inherent power in being feared, a power that resonates so furiously that it has been embedded in the cultural fabric of mainstream media for the past century. Women are scary because they are formidable

FOR ALL THE LADIES OUT THERE, MAKE SURE TO EAT BOYS FOR BREAKFAST AND REMEMBER THAT HELL IS A TEENAGE GIRL.

ENDNOTES
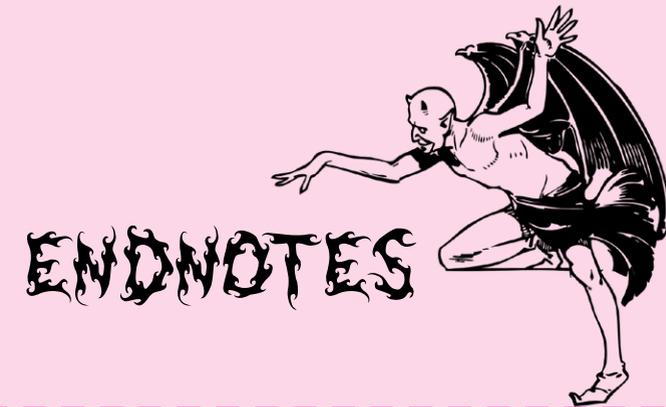
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Nico

I went down to the beach with a friend on the last day of autumn. She brought a set of chalk paints to pass the time, and I let her press the blue one into the hollow of my knee. She dragged it down in a stream towards my ankle and we sat still there as long as we could until the sand had turned cold. Then we stood and walked aimlessly along the ocean's edge to the place where the pathway fell over the cliff. With each extension of my leg it looked as though my knee was crying.

lolitamerica

The Blurring of Youth, Age, and Sexualization in American Media

Mariah Mickens

Bubblegum · Golden Years · Nostalgic Blues · Tween · Silver Fox · Cherry Pop

American media is overly-saturated with depictions of youth, given that young people are a huge target audience. A consequence of this is the sexualization of youth on screen as well as the infantilized depictions of adult characters presented throughout media history. Purposeful reasoning like director's notes or artistic intention behind scenes often give clarification as to why these depictions exist, yet they cannot justify inappropriate depictions as helpful or safe. It is fitting to assume that neglected portrayals of youth and childlike adults in American media can be problematic to our societal development because of the effects it can have on the actor/actress as well as viewers.

"Sex Sells" combined with our cultural obsession with youth creates a grey area within American media. The infamous "Dawson Casting" occurrence has been widely used in order for production to work around not having youth on set. The term pokes fun at how most of the characters on the teen show *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) were in their 20's acting as teens. This type of casting choice exists because child actors are protected by labor laws and schooling hours. Besides having more of a possibility to acquire a stunt double, it is easier to work with adult actors because they are often cheaper to cast than children and they attract a larger demographic appeal. But this has a negative effect on real-life teens who think they should look as perfect as these adults playing them on TV. Beth Daniels, Developmental psychology professor at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs talks about this in a dialogue with Slate on the topic. "In contemporary teen shows today, they have actors who don't even physically resemble teenagers. So now the expectation, or the standard, is way out of line with actual teen bodies, and the possibility for body dissatisfaction jumps up"[1]. Daniels speaks to the truth of comparing oneself to the teens seen on screen. On the flip side, getting children to play their own roles is not sunshine and rainbows either. Yes, it is nice to see actual teen casts, like on Netflix's *Strang-*

er Things. However, not every young character is written for a young audience.

It is common for child actors to play roles in R rated films. Each is problematic in their own way; however, some films are forced to depict things more carefully than others. In *Léon*, aka *Leon, the Professional* (1994) for America's release, Jean Reno's character becomes a caretaker for orphaned 12-year old Mathilda (played by 13 year-old Natalie Portman). In the film, he teaches her how to defend herself, assassin style. In the American version of one particular scene, Leon denies Mathildas plea to kiss him as they drink while seated in a restaurant. She lightly confesses her love to him as Léon tells her to stop with a serious look on his face, drawing a palpable line between 'adult' and 'kid'. The scene ends with Mathilda laughing joyfully, adding to her adolescent, childlike complexity. Originally, the script had way more sexual undertones, though Léon still acted the same way toward Mathilda. This scene, along with several others, was changed in order for Portman's parents to even allow her to play the role. This shows why "Dawson Casting" exists from a filmmaker's perspective (and why it's good for parents to have a say in their child's acting roles). Director Luc Besson could have just chosen a different child actress who had more lenient parents, or he could have opted for a 21+ actress to begin with. It also shows how a movie can still be enjoyable without pushing the boundaries of a young actress.

Similar to child actors playing roles in R rated films, adult actors also play youthful roles that are realistically too mature for a child to perform. *In Diary of*
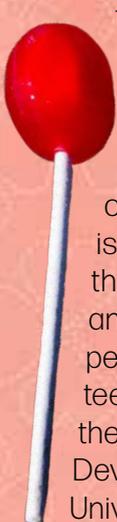
a Teenage Girl (2015), actress Bel Powley was 23 years-old playing 15 year-old Minnie. The indie film had a positive critical reception, being deemed as "raw" "unconventional" and "without judgement". The explicit sexual encounters between Minnie and her Mother's boyfriend Monroe, played by Alexander Skarsgård are very intimately detailed, playing a big role in Minnie's sexual awakening. The film purposely sacrifices the modesty of teenage representation in favor of its tone and underlying premises.

Though this choice is understandable from a filmmaker's perspective, it is still important to portray youth representation as thoughtfully and carefully as possible. Horror thriller *The Neon Demon* (2016) is a better cinematic example of respectfully portraying youth on screen. Elle Fanning was 22 years-old when she portrayed 16 year-old Jesse. Though the film shows other characters fully naked, Jesse is depicted sexually, but viewers never see Jesse's nudity on-screen, implicitly respecting the boundaries of youth representation. As viewers, we can understand that an actor is old enough for the role they are playing, but still feel awkward about what is going on in the cinematic world. This is normal, as one may feel unsettled but intrigued when exploring taboo subjects through media. Disclaimer: Every film is different, just as every young person is different. No film can please everyone, as it is not realistic to expect every filmmaker to follow an unspoken rule of how to treat young characters within their scripts of choice. All over media, these age-gap commonalities are included in the vast collection of what it means to be a part of youth. As filmmakers, a good start to alleviate this grey area is to do a ton of research and to always question a character's behaviors and motives. It is up to the viewer to form positive or negative opinions on what is being watched. The viewer is also free to stay critical of what is being seen, even if the

viewer does not see it as problematic.

Entering the discussion of age, aside from sexualization and youth, it is seen throughout history that the dichotomy between the young protagonist and the elderly mentor have kept their contrasting characteristics. These traditional archetypes have been endlessly adapted to fit current generations, given it is an unforgettable component to the Hero's Journey, heavily discussed in Joseph Campbell's Hero With A Thousand Faces. In chapter five, Campbell explains the Supernatural Aid, which refers to "a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass"[4]. It is clear that the young Hero needs a mature ally to guide them through future hardships; as the juxtaposition of old and young is always visible and important to note according to its changes and transformations.

Youth is a desired period of time where one has the capacity and stamina to experience life to the fullest. Though wisdom is earned with aging, youth has always proven to be the popular vote between the two because it speaks to the shared fear that every human being has about death; though death is inevitable, not many want to experience that particular unknown. This, aside from historical origins of folktales and mythology may be why protagonists are overwhelmingly young when it comes to storytelling. Acknowledging that media is framed from society, the cultural norm of ageism must be considered. In the text "Social Practice With Older Adults", Associate professor's Jill Chonody and Barbra Teater mention the tone of ageism within American culture. "As a result, many Western cultures, including the United States, can be readily described as "youth dominated". Young people are seen as the
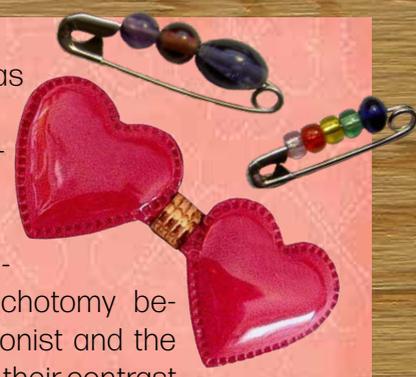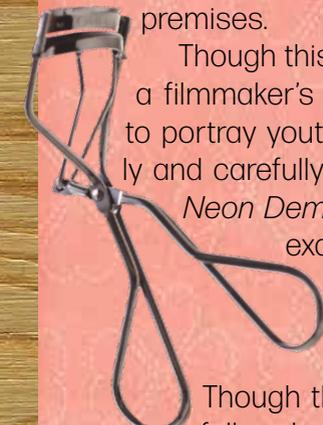
embodiment of all that is valued— beauty, vitality, and longevity. Aging, on the other hand, is associated with disgust. Older people represent failure; they have "let themselves go." This point of view on aging is culturally reinforced and supported, and negative characteristics are attributed to older people simply because they are 'old' (e.g., Kite & Johnson, 1988)".[5] As aforementioned, American media is fixated on this "youth domination". It's gotten so bad that it's brought up multiple discussions in the entertainment industry. Celebrity pop-culture YouTube channel, Nicki Swift made a whole video about why actress, Mila Kunis disappeared out of the spotlight. The first reason she mentions is ageism in Hollywood. The video mentions an interview Kunis had with Playboy Magazine where she talks about the future of her career. "It's weird that at the age of 29 I'm talking about aging in this industry, but the truth is I don't think I can do this for the rest of my life"[6]. It is ridiculous that even before her 30's, an actress as stunning as Mila Kunis has to worry about her age affecting her work, similar to many other female entertainers. "This orientation has produced a kind of "youth nepotism" in the film and television industry similar to that in the advertising industry", says Linda S. Whitton in the text "Ageism: Paternalism and Prejudice". "Young executives tend to be selected to produce youth-oriented programs, and these young executives tend to surround themselves with young writers, directors, and actors"[7].

Given all these things, it is easier to understand how adult actors play infantilized roles. If American Media is "youth dominated", the mentality starts to become "if you can't beat them, join them". Of course, this will leave a sour taste in one's mouth, as adults should act like what they are;

adults. This does nothing to stop the discussion around the concept of mental age vs biological age. Are we adults because we feel that we are, or because traditional adult ideologies have coaxed us into being less positive, less imaginative, and more desensitized? The true answer varies from person to person. Interestingly, the song "Taller Children" by indie band Elizabeth & The Catapult claims "don't you know you don't get smarter, you're the same as you started, you just jump a little higher". That seems to be the case for a big chunk of American media.

Diving deeper into the juxtapositions of desired youth and matured wisdom, one must not ignore the normalization of childlike innocence and behavior in adult characters as these two contrasts start to blend together. Marilyn Monroe's career shows an example of this blend. In the text "Chasing Lolita" by Graham Vickers, he mentions a very uncomfortable truth about the portrayal and legacy she had throughout her extensive filmography. "...About half of the twenty-two films she appeared in during the 1950s helped to define her as the ultimate Hollywood sex goddess and one whose erotic charge was indivisible from what would become one of the decade's chief preoccupations: childish feminine innocence wrapped up in an adult body. Monroe's body was not just adult; it was almost a caricature of a fully formed woman; ample breasts, curvy hips, bleached hair, and lots of lipstick were the visible assets. But they were paired with a wide-eyed expression and a mannered, breathy little voice that signaled child ingenuousness".[8] This awkward childlike persona is alike to many other films around and after it's time. Many of the films directed by Roman Polanski depict this type of childlike-woman character. This adds an extra layer of creepy to an already unsettling subject, due to Polanski's pre Me-Too Movement convictions. In speaking of Me-Too Movement convictions, TV writer/producer
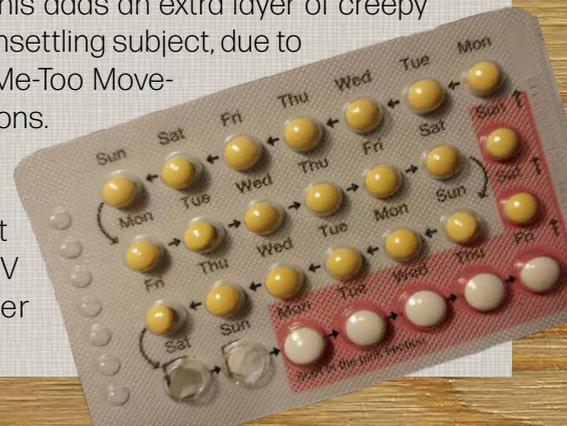
Dan Schneider also played around with this type of character. In *Victorious* (2010), Cat Valentine, played by Ariana Grande often acted very childlike. What's weirder is, Cat's character developed into acting like that overtime. In the first season, Cat displayed some erratic mood swings but acted her age. In the second season, Jade (the best character on the show) is screaming for her to stop singing the Sesame Street theme song. There are plenty of reasons why Cat's character displays this type of immature behavior, according to her background. However, as a filmmaker, one can spot an excuse for something creepy when one sees one.
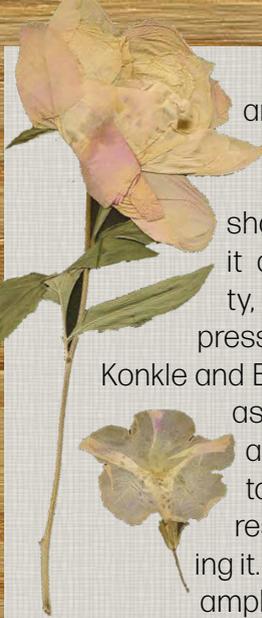
Many media creators continue to adapt the childlike demeanor into their own bodies of work. Viner turned YouTube content creator, Lele Pons often displays this behavior in her videos, as her audience mainly consists of kids and teens. Managed by Shots Studios, she may not have full control over w h a t content goes in her videos and her slapstick comedic tone is ultimately a joke. However, paying attention to Pons' childlike dimwittedness along with the way she shows off her own sex-appeal, her videos can insinuate to younger audiences it is acceptable, even cute to act so immature in your 20's. Pons' videos blurs adult themes with childlike behavior so often, it has gotten negative attention from other channels on the site. Many channels harshly critique her work, such as Cody Ko, diesel patches, BionicPig, etc. YouTube content creator and English Professor, Giulia-Christina otherwise known as READY TO GLARE, elaborates her thoughts on Pons in an analysis video titled "Trash Content EP. 2: Lele Pons". She states, "What is uncanny about her is... how she infantilizes herself and also sexualizes herself [in other videos]...We have this paradox of 'oh haha I'm so awkward and so childish and so immature' but then, you see her looking like a 25 year-old...so those two ideas just don't connect...

On the contrary, they juxtapose each other so you're just left in confusion of like, okay so which one is it?"[9]. The backlash is similar to the uncomfortable feelings felt by the Los Angeles audience during the *Leon, The Professional* screening mentioned previously. However, this weird trend keeps on giving.

Hulu's new Show, *Pen15* has to be mentioned when talking about this topic. The show is absolutely hilarious and seemingly others agree, as 91% of Google users liked the show. Adding a new perspective on the prepubescent awkwardness of surviving Middle School, 7th graders Maya and Anna navigate through changes in life, friendship and beyond. The tongue-in-cheek casting choice is funny though it immediately raises some yellow/orange flags if not red. Comics Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle are in their 30's reenacting their past adolescent personas. Meanwhile, their peers, classmates and crushes are all casted as young teens. Bold move, Hulu. A great article by Popsugar Entertainment goes into detail about why these choices were made and how carefully the situations were contemplated. "The most difficult challenge that Erskine and Konkle faced was how to portray the sexual aspects of coming of age ...without causing any discomfort for both viewers 'and the young actors. As Konkle explained to The Hollywood Reporter, "How do we tell the real story that makes the show R-rated and the truth and do it safely, but still really well?" The answer is: a little bit of clever camera work". They then give an example of how a kiss between Anna's character and her 7th grade boyfriend was cleverly cut with a stunt-double, as to not repeat what happened on the set of Interview With a Vampire. "In the scene of Anna's first kiss, the camera zooms close up to a pair of lips (which actually belong to Konkle's real-life boyfriend, not the young actor) and the camera cuts away after the actors share an agonizingly long stare".[10] It's great that Konkle

Women of 35 look 10 years younger instantly...!

Important Hollywood Make-up Secret revealed for the first time!

and Erskine were prepared for the understandable awkwardness that is impossible to resist in this show. *Pen15* is inevitably awkward, as it deals with Middle School, puberty, and all of those other shared repressed memories. It's also great how Konkle and Erskine made sure to be as careful as possible while owning their creative perspective. They do their best to maintain the truth of teenage representation without overtly sexualizing it. Allowing them to create a good example of crossing boundaries without harming the youth involved. "Sure, they could have cast adults for all of the roles, but as Konkle pointed out, the series would then feel like a sketch. "The humor would be lifted away from it, and the authenticity that is brought, and even just the very basic, simple feeling of it's funny to us to be made fun of by

kids," she told The Hollywood Reporter. "It kept coming back to it's so important to fill this world with the authentic teenagers that really are 13".[11]

In conclusion, though American media has overwhelmingly explored blurring the lines of age, youth and sexualization; the backlash has proven that it is far from a good idea. In the past, media creators should have been more careful when exploring these types of subjects. Now, though problems still erupt, criticism is always present to put things in place. More than ever, the youth is able to share their own ideas and opinions on these subjects online, adding to the collective of criticism that matters and deserves to be heard. With more open communication comes a better understanding of what is okay and what is harmful. Fortunately, American media can start to make a good change in the right direction in the near future.

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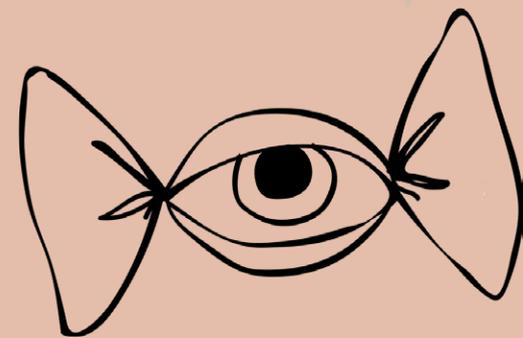
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GENDER & ACTING

By Samantha Conde
Layout by Edie Trautwein and Brandon Castro

Cross-Gender Acting

Cross-gender acting is acting as a different gender than what you identify, similar to drag performance. It has existed for centuries out of necessity, acting ability, or comedy. Nowadays, audiences and performers have shifted their views on cross-gender acting and are more positive towards the artform. It is helping those in society to not have to conform to any gender norms because their entertainment is open to these ideas. Although, there used to be some negatives as to why theaters or productions utilized cross-gender acting.
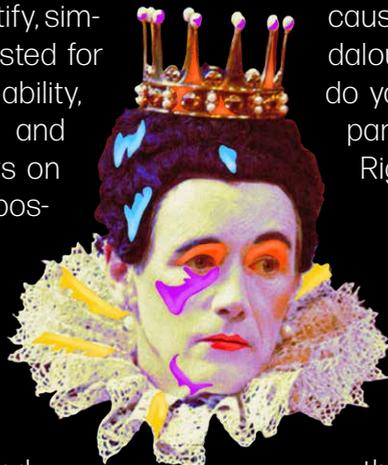
Old Theater

In the 5th century, theater was evolving into an art form in which people would perform and act on a stage. Women were not allowed to participate, resulting in men taking over any female role and character.[1] This portrayal was not intended to be offensive and was merely done to have a play be performed. However, it is stated that it was too dangerous for women to perform on stage because it could be too "enticing."[2] Too scandalous for ancient Greeks? No! Never. What do you mean? It's not like they had many parties and sex orgies all the time, right? Right? Okay, moving on...

(Other) Theater/Television

Eventually, women fought very hard to be on stage. And, they were finally beginning to perform alongside their male actors. Although, it was a bit harder for the women in Asia to be considered as acting peers. For example, during the 16th century, a few women in Japan wanted to act and perform plays for their community. They took it upon themselves to perform along the banks of Kyoto's river when they were still not allowed on a physical stage. However, in 1629, shogunate prohibited women from acting- and as a further insult, they also banned child actors in 1652.[3] Some theaters believed that women were thought to be too natural which is why men were trained to look graceful and perfectly portray a certain kind of woman on stage. Women looked too natural? Is this a joke? I wish this was a joke.

Let's fast forward to something a little more recent! Caryl Churchill, a British playwright, wrote a play titled *Cloud Nine* in 1979. In the play, a comedy-drama, she purposely wrote stage directions for characters to be played by a different gender, such as "Betty, [Clive's] wife, played by a man," "Edward, [Clive's] son, played by a woman," and "Cathy, Lin's Daughter, age 5, played by a man."[4] Clearly, Churchill has identified how powerful the role of cross-gender is within acting. *Cloud Nine* is known for having cross-gender acting roles and it is utilized almost like the play's punchline, not necessarily used as a comedic effect, but to enhance her characters. It is a genius play by a genius woman. Seriously people, go read this play.

Current Theater & Television Shows

Cross-gender acting continues to exist in our modern times! It can be almost imperceptible because of the amazing advancements entertainment has made with animation, makeup, computer-generated imagery (CGI), prosthetics, etc. I mean, did you see how they made Ingvild Deila look like 19-year-old Carrie Fisher in *Rogue One*?! That was the start of something amazing!

Let's dive a little bit deeper into a current show that is widely popular and has cross-gender VOICE acting. The comedic animated series *Bob's Burgers* (2011-) created by Loren Bouchard has multiple male voice actors who portray women. It is an animated sitcom of this family that operates and runs a burger restaurant. The viewers follow their many hysterical adventures and the love they have for one another. The family consists of the parents, Bob Belcher, voiced by Jon H. Benjamin, Linda Belcher, voiced by John Roberts, and their kids, Tina, Gene, and Louise, voiced by Dan Mintz, Eugene Mirman, and Kristen Schall. Taking a look at the cast- do you notice that two of the three female characters are voiced by men?
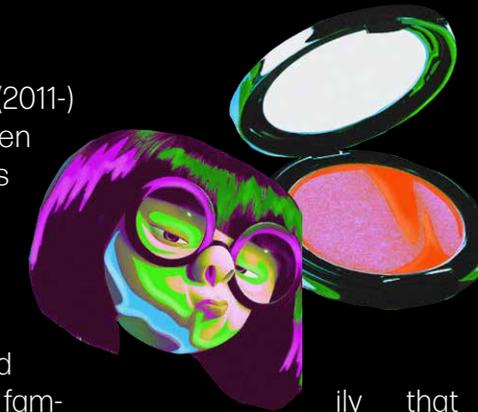
> "This shows what Hollywood's idea of what a man should be!"

Side Track

Let me put the record straight, I am not saying there is anything wrong with this. I love *Bob's Burgers*. I am truly absolutely thankful for the many episodes that have caused me to laugh and have a good time. And, I will always support people and how they wish to be identified.

Back to the show!

Bob's Burgers is a family show and many people do not know or attempt to find out who the voice actors are. Many women and younger girls relate closely to the characters of Linda and Tina, who are both voiced by men. Audiences, of course, get confused when they go to conventions to meet and greet the famous voice actors from the show and find that John Roberts and Dan Mintz are impersonating these women. How did this come to be?

Originally, in the pilot, Tina's character was a boy named Daniel; however, it was changed because the show believed that Gene and this character were too similar. Because Fox liked the show, they told Bouchard to change Daniel to a girl, thus creating Tina and keeping the same voice actor, Dan Mintz.[5]

John Roberts has a different story on how he came to voice act for the role of Linda. Years ago, Roberts would upload comedic YouTube videos of himself impersonating his middle-aged mother. After being recognized for his talent, Roberts was offered the role of Linda bringing his knack of voice acting to the show.[6]

Acting as female characters is not difficult for these male actors. The hard part is when they are asked if acting as a woman ruins the integrity of that role. Does it? Should it? No, because these actors are doing what they love best and are doing it in a way that respects these kinds of roles. This is a great example to other people who identify as a male that they are capable to also work in such roles that used to be closed off to them. This shows how men do not always have to act so masculinely to be a great actor and well known, and they do not have to conform to what Hollywood's idea of a man should be!

There are a few who do believe it ruins the integrity of the role. Not only that, but it causes an unfairness to women in the acting industry because men

> "...it causes an unfairness to women in the acting industry because men are stealing roles again."

are "stealing" roles. I can agree with the second statement. To this day, it is still hard for a woman to land a role in show business. There are shows who choose to ignore this; however, *Bob's Burgers* is trying to address this issue in their own way. The casting crew and technical side of the show have been attempting to hire more female voice actors and give them lasting or recurring roles. Bouchard said, "We're not proud taking jobs from women. That's not what we want as slug line under *Bob's [Burgers]* to be – 'Taking jobs from women since 2010.'"[7]

That makes me feel happy for this show! It has a strong crew with a strong cast and it keeps growing even though it has been a hit for so many years. Break down all those stereotypes and build a platform where men can feel like they, too, can be cast in such roles.

Bob's Burgers is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to female characters voiced by men. Let's get our minds blown by these other cross-gender acting roles:

- *The Incredibles,* director Brad Bird; 2004 - Brad Bird as Edna Mode
- *Adventure Time,* creator Pendleton Ward; 2010-2018 - Pendleton Ward as Lumpy Space Princess
- *Monsters Inc.,* director Pete Docter, et al; 2001 - Bob Peterson as Roz
- *Arthur*, director Greg Bailey; 1996 - present - Multiple young boys as D.W. Read

And of course, everyone from the YouTube series *The Most Popular Girls in School.* Such talented voice actors that are underappreciated. Speaking of underappreciated, let's talk about women acting as men.

Let's Flip

Even though women were not always allowed on stage does not mean they never had the urge to perform at all. There were several brave and bold women during the 1600s that acted, despite legal restrictions.[8]

While men's performances were seen as art, women's performances had them labeled as prostitutes who degraded the artform and production.

Thankfully, all of this has changed. Of course, this took many many years of fighting and feministic actions to occur. Women eventually gained their rightful place on stage and acted their hearts out! Slowly, women were becoming more valuable to theater, television, and film, with their biggest asset being their voices.

Voice acting for women started out rough, but they were able to secure their roles in such productions. They were specifically used a lot to voice the roles of young boys. The need for this was because it was difficult to come by young boys who were able to act. If once in a blue moon a boy was able to voice act, they were only available for a limited time. Young boys are also unreliable because of the change in their voice as they grow older.[9] This opened up more opportunities for women to voice act in the industry.

If a woman can achieve even one role, they will most likely get other roles for young boys in other shows. Let's take Nancy Cartwright, for example. She became popular for her role as Bart Simpson, but she had previously acted for roles as Chuckie Finster, Rudy Mookich, and many more! Another example is Pamela Adlon who voiced Bobby Hill, Dewey Duck, Andy Johnson, Milo Oblong, and a lot more.

Bonus characters that were voiced by amazing female actors:

- Tommy Pickles
- Dexter
- Timmy Turner

Here are a few other examples of films that are popular and include cross-gender acting:

- *Mrs. Doubtfire*, director Chris Columbus; 1993 - Robin Williams as Mrs. Doubtfire
- *White Chicks,* director Keenen Ivory Wayans; 2004 - Shawn Wayans and Marlon Wayans as Brittany Wilson and Tiffany Wilson
- *Diary of a Mad Black Woman,* director Darren grant; 2005 - Tyler Perry as Madea
- *Hairspray*, director Adam Shankman; 2007 - John Travolta

All in all, cross-gender acting has been around forever. It is a beautiful art that has so many layers and history to it. Acting as an alternate gender was first a necessity as women were not allowed on stage. Next, it became a tool to poke fun at other genders by exaggerating their features, clothes, and behavior. Even though that is still the case, cross-gender acting has evolved into something better, whether it is used to emphasize characters or out of necessity. It is something that has been uplifted in recent years and will become something new in the future.

Untitled 2020

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Unmasking A "Split" Framework

~Written by~ Emma Soltani

I am an avid consumer of psychological horrors and thrillers. There is something about diving deep into someone's psyche that engages and prompts me to contemplate the inner workings of my own mind. However, it is important to consume this genre of media with a grain of salt, because real mental illnesses or disorders can be stigmatized from improper representation. For example, I first became aware of dissociative identity disorder, or DID, after watching M. Night Shyamalan's *Split* (2016). DID is caused by trauma and results in the mind creating separate personalities that take over, or front, at various times.[1] The film heavily dramatized the disorder, portraying it as a violent condition and something to fear. Portrayals like this are extremely damaging to how DID is viewed by society and takes us a step back in normalizing mental illnesses and disorders. However, since then, content creators have been stepping in the right direction, with media such as the four-season series *Mr. Robot* (2015-2019) created by Sam Esmail. Through its main character Elliot, *Mr. Robot* normalizes DID and portrays it as something that is simply misunderstood.

Traditionally, horrors and thrillers have garnered massive success in the box office, primarily due to their "depictions of 'madness,'" as an article from BBC states.[2] Some recognizable films include Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), and Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). However, rather than being sensitive to the portrayal of mental illnesses and disorders, these films, as well as many others, lean towards "sensationalism," or creating a shock factor at the expense of an accurate portrayal.[3] In *Movies and Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychopathology* by Danny Wedding and Ryan M. Niemiec, psychiatrist Peter Byrne explains that a director's main goal is to make a profit off of their film, not to "educate the public."[4] However, although it is valid to point out that films are made to make money, a level of morality should still be maintained. A film can simultaneously be successful and sensitive to mental illnesses and disorders. Unfortunately, the main intention of these types of films is not to remain sensitive, but rather create suspense and invoke fear, most often painting the characters

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with mental illnesses and disorders as unsympathetic villains. In these portrayals, these characters are viewed as "perpetrators of violence" and "'dangerous' to society," as a report from the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism states.[5] Although these pieces end up being critically acclaimed and feature incredible performances, it is vital for us to not gloss over the misinformation and stigmatization of mental illnesses and disorders they spread.

According to Cleveland Clinic, DID is a rare type of dissociative disorder causing memory, consciousness, perception, and sometimes identity to break down. Most cases stem from abuse and trauma as a way to dissociate from troubling events. Often, this results in the repression of associated emotions and pain. Throughout the process of this repression, alternate personalities, or "alters," are created in addition to the "core" personality. They can come and go over time, with more alters being created or different alters replacing earlier ones. Additionally, when an alter fronts, the core personality is often unaware and experiences amnesia after they have released control.[6] This is especially highlighted in *Mr. Robot*, particularly in scenes when Elliot's alter, Mr. Robot, fronted and, most often, had conversations with other people that Elliot did not remember talking to or even meeting. Although DID is not commonly depicted in film and television, it has not gone unnoticed in recent years. I saw *Split* when it was first playing in theaters. It separated itself from the typical horror film, as there had not been many recent mainstream pieces that focused on the depiction of DID. However, after analyzing it and educating myself on DID, I have come to realize that it dramatized the disorder and portrayed it negatively and harmful-

ly. The film followed Kevin Wendell Crumb and his 24 alters after one of his leading alters, Dennis, a recovering pedophile with OCD, abducted three girls: Casey, Claire, and Marcia. While in captivity, the girls were eventually introduced to more of Kevin's alters while they attempted to figure out a way to escape. Additionally, throughout the film, the different alters continually hint at "The Beast," Kevin's hidden and especially predatory 24th alter.

Despite shedding light on what was otherwise known as an overlooked mental disorder, the film did more harm than good. Right off the bat, Kevin had 24 active alters, which is more than the average amount of active alters an individual with DID would ever have at a given time. The National Alliance on Mental Illness Michigan states that the number of alters an individual with DID has in their lifetime ranges from two to 100, but the average number is ten at a given time. They can come and go, but the number generally remains stable over the years.[7] In the film, there were many indications that Kevin had 23-24 active alters at the time. For example, there was a scene when Kevin's therapist, Dr. Karen Fletcher, was talking to Dennis, who was disguised as Barry, another one of Kevin's leading alters. Although Dennis was trying to mask himself as Barry, Dr. Fletcher tried to persuade him to reveal who he really was. She stated, "Based on the description of all 23 identities that live in Kevin's body that I've gotten from Barry, I think I'm talking to Dennis."[8] Despite The Beast not being completely established to the audience at this point, this was still a direct indication that Kevin had 23 active alters at that time, as well as throughout the film. As an audience member with no prior knowledge of DID, this detail confused me as to whether or not it was normal for those with DID

to have a large number of alters at one time.

One particularly interesting aspect of the film was that all of Kevin's alters were played by James McAvoy. This was an accurate move, as in reality, while a singular person embodies different alters, others are still physically viewing them as one person. McAvoy is a very talented actor and did a particularly great job at playing these alters in a way that distinguished them all from each other, which was also seen in scenes that did not include an outfit change. One example of this is when his therapist catches Dennis trying to impersonate another alter, Barry. At that moment, McAvoy's facial expression and body language made a distinct shift from Barry's confident and cheerful demeanor to Dennis' serious and strict persona. As an audience member, it felt like a completely different character was present and was one of the scenes that won me over, in terms of McAvoy's performance.

Additionally, Split portrayed Kevin's alters as being largely disturbing and violent. Examples of this were shown in the fact that Dennis abducted Casey, Claire, and Marcia at the beginning of the film, and that The Beast was a cannibalistic monster. More specifically, The Guardian article "From Split to Psycho: why cinema fails dissociative identity disorder" features a quote by Dr. Simone Reinders, who is a neuroscientist at King's College London, stating that it is inaccurate to paint individuals with DID as "extremely violent and prone to doing bad things," as most tend to "hide" the disorder.[9] Depictions like this are extremely damaging, not only to individuals with DID but to outsiders who are unfamiliar with the

disorder. Speaking from personal experience, Split introduced me to DID. After watching the film, I thought DID was particularly dangerous and that most cases were like Kevin's. I was shocked to find out that the film heavily dramatized the disorder and was not accurate in its depiction. I then became interested in the disorder, researched it further, and learned just how much it was overdone. Although Split showcases some incredible performances, it should have remained sensitive to what it was portraying, such as other media like Mr. Robot. Split could have still been gripping with a more realistic approach to a mental disorder that is overlooked and not widely known.

I jumped on the Mr. Robot bandwagon a little too late, having started watching it in March 2019, despite the first season being released in 2015. Having known more about DID since watching Split, Mr. Robot seemed like a much more normalized and relatable portrayal. The show follows Elliot Alderson, a cybersecurity engineer turned hacker who attempted to, with the help of the hacker group "fsociety," wipe out everyone's debt by taking down E Corp, one of the largest conglomerates in the world. Throughout the series, it was revealed that Elliot had some deeply rooted childhood trauma, but he was ultimately no different from a regular American citizen. It was not even explicitly noticeable to himself that he had DID until the last few episodes of the first season, and as the show progressed he learned how to take control of his disorder and accept it as something that made him stronger. As an audience member with some prior knowledge about DID, I was impressed with how the show highlighted the disorder and painted it as a part of Elliot that he was able to work through.

Mr. Robot is incredibly unique and became one of my all-time favorite shows. It seems like a typical thriller—suspenseful music, mysterious characters, and illegal activity—but, its underlying focus is mental illness such as DID, as well as anxiety, depression, and addiction. These are all portrayed both constructively and accurately through utilizing unique plot techniques such as breaking

the fourth wall and fascinating plot twists. Not to mention that the show is entirely from the point of view of the protagonist, who continually acknowledged and included the audience in the narrative. As an audience member, I was constantly engaged and felt like I was part of the show with how often Elliot and his alters spoke directly to me.

Elliot had only four alters, which was closer to the average amount of alters one may actually have. Focusing on a smaller number of alters made it easier to completely follow the narrative without getting lost, which would be especially helpful for audience members who were unfamiliar with DID. If I had watched Mr. Robot before I had ever watched Split, I would have been able to better understand this disorder and gain a more realistic grip on it. Along with this, all of Elliot's alters were not completely established from the beginning but were gradually introduced across all four seasons. The first indication that Elliot had DID was not even shown until the ninth episode of the first season. In that episode, titled, "eps.1.8_m1rr0r1ng.qt," it was revealed to both him and the audience that Mr. Robot was one of his alters, resembling a version of his late father.

This reveal was particularly unexpected, along with the reveals of Elliot's three other alters, as they were all played by different actors. It made the show more engaging, cemented the first-person perspective that the show was set in, and uniquely portrayed the interactions between the alters. The entirety of the first season was a good example of this, as up until the ninth episode, it was unclear whether or not Mr. Robot was one of Elliot's alters. Although the interactions between Elliot and Mr. Robot seemed visible to the audience, Elliot appeared to be talking to himself to other characters in the show. It was also unclear when Mr. Robot was fronting, as the audience viewed him as a separate person to Elliot (Rami Malek as Elliot and Christian Slater as Mr. Robot), while other characters in the show just viewed Elliot. However, once it was established that Elliot had DID and Mr. Robot was one of his alters, the general rule of thumb was established

that scenes of Mr. Robot interacting with others were instances where he had fronted. As an audience member, once this was revealed, it was like I was watching a completely different show.

In terms of how Elliot was portrayed in having DID, Mr. Robot normalized him. Granted, he had other mental illnesses, a unique and extremely developed hacking skill, and was constantly engaged in illegal activity. But at the end of the day, he was simply an American citizen trying to find himself in the midst of chaos. Unlike Split, he was not depicted as someone to fear but someone who was working towards managing his many struggles. Specifically, Elliot had anxiety, depression, a morphine addiction, and broken relationships with others which he attempts to manage through actively seeking therapy. Although a depiction like this may be difficult to watch, it breaks the stigma around these mental illnesses and disorders, allowing those who have them to be able to relate to someone else, and those who do not to be able to become more aware of what other people are working through.

Both Split and Mr. Robot were two completely different pieces of media, one being a feature-length film and the other being a four-season television series, with different depictions of the same disorder. However, they both established one main root of DID that both of the protagonists had experienced in their pasts: childhood trauma. The book The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by psychiatrist Bessel A. Van der Kolk discusses that trauma leaves lasting imprints, affecting how survivors
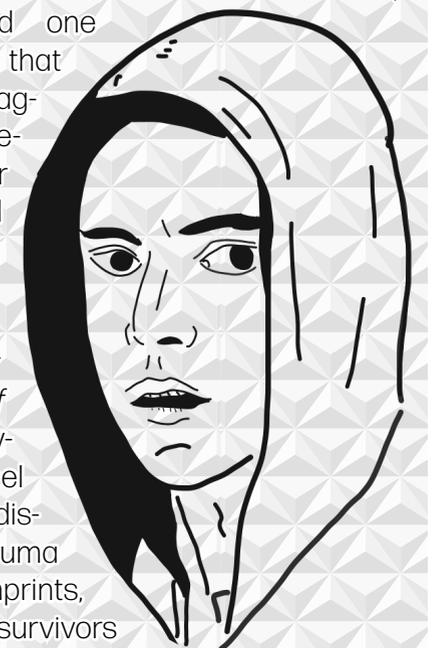
perceive the world, the people around them, and themselves.[10] This exposure to trauma, especially at a young age, can cause trust issues in the future,[11] as well as a sense of feeling "damaged to the core and beyond redemption."[12] In *Split*, it was conveyed that Kevin had an abusive mother and in *Mr. Robot*, it was established that Elliot had both an abusive mother and father. The quality of Kevin's relationships with others and how he viewed his life was not largely highlighted, but it was clear that Elliot had unstable and inconsistent relationships with others, as well as a poor outlook on his life, often resorting to substance abuse.

Despite being two different depictions of DID, *Split* and *Mr. Robot* are still notable pieces of media that should have been praised for depicting an overlooked and often stigmatized mental disorder. They feature phenomenal performances and invoke an immense amount of emotion that make the stories continuously enthralling. In fact, after watching both pieces, James McAvoy and Rami Malek have become two of my favorite actors. In terms of moving forward, not every audience member is going to dedicate time to research DID and educate themselves about it, so it is important for future films and television shows to portray it as accurately as possible. The last thing people with DID, or any other mental illness or disorder, need is to be invalidated. Although no piece of media is perfect, it is clear that we are taking strides in a more progressive direction.

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HOW *ARRIVAL* CHANGED SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA

BY JOYCE CHANG

"IF YOU COULD SEE YOUR LIFE FROM START TO FINISH, WOULD YOU CHANGE THINGS?"

This line is asked by Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams) in the film *Arrival* (2016), directed by the critically acclaimed French-Canadian filmmaker Denis Villenueve. This is a question which comes in the film's resolution, as the protagonist dwells in the aftermath of her journey. Louise, the heroine of the story, begins her journey as a linguistics professor called upon by the American government for help when twelve unidentified objects appearing to be from another planet suddenly land separately in 12 different places around the world. She and Dr. Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner), a theoretical physicist, are tasked with figuring out what the foreign species wants and what their purpose is for landing on Earth. By the time Louise poses the previously quoted question, the plot twist in the film has already occured and audiences understand that Louise now knows her future and how every event in her life will play out. It is this moment that truly solidifies the film's significant and unique role in the genre of science fiction cinema.

On the surface, *Arrival* is presented as a pretty generic, one-genre film. From the trailer and poster alone, it seems to be advertised as nothing more than another action-packed Sci-fi film played by big names, and although the movie does include all of those aspects, it actually proves to be so much more than that. Underneath the facade is a multi-layered story, and as the film progresses, *Arrival* begins to raise a number of questions on themes of humanity, psychology, and philosophy. Through these factors, *Arrival* has managed to integrate its mark into fashioning itself as a turning point for where the future of sci-fi cinema is headed in terms of not only its deeper, more cerebral themes, but through its inclusivity of the female gender as well, and due to these elements *Arrival* reigns at the top of my list of movies that have completely shifted my outlook on life.

This film was initially introduced to me in the year of 2017. I was 17 years old, about to graduate high school and start a brand new chapter in my life. However, like most of us were, I was pretty haunted by the person I was during the majority of my teenage years. *Arrival* came at an important time in my life because upon watching the film I realized I strongly resonated with Louise, more so with how she was presented towards the beginning of the film. Louise is first introduced as a quiet, passive individual who seemed neither happy nor sad, but just someone who seemed to accept continuing on with a mundane, daily routine, merely existing and nothing more. Her facial expression remained stoic as she went on each day, going from her humongous house she lived in alone, to her job as a professor at the university, then back home again. It is evident she had no close friends, confidants, romantic partners, or even work friends and it was clear she made no efforts to make any. At the time I was the same, never really making any effort to form or strengthen any type of relationship with others out of a mixture of fear, anxiety, and just plain disinterest. I couldn't seem to find a valid reason why I shouldn't continue keeping others at arm's length, and because of this, I only had a few people whom I considered to be truly important in my life. Just like Louise, my way of really participating in the world was as an observer, as she was constantly watching the world through the confines of her clear, glass windows in her neatly furnished home or on the glow of a television screen before she fell asleep on the couch at night. Because of this, my day to day routine grew monotonous and dull, yet due to the anxiety that had plagued me, I was satisfied because I saw this as playing life safely rather than potentially getting hurt from somebody or something. Louise's life also seemed just as boring when on a phone call with her mother. She softly says, "you know me... nothing's changed," signifying the dullness of her life and her lack of excitement in her daily routines. Even when the aliens arrive and the world around her is clearly shaken with disorder, Louise continues on with her routine, seemingly unaffected by the chaos that's going on, proving that not even a possible alien invasion could've phased her as she clearly had no one or nothing to worry about and there wasn't anything that truly mattered to her.

Eventually, Louise is assigned with the task to help figure out what the unidentified aliens want, and as the film progresses, Louise and Ian both continue making big breakthroughs in their mission, deepening their relationship along the way. As Louise continues her research on the language of the Heptapods, she seems to be infiltrated more and more with thoughts of her daughter, who audiences learn in the very beginning of the film had passed at a young age from a rare and incurable disease. However, by the climax of the film, we learn that what audiences thought were "memories" of her daughter were not actually flashbacks, but instead fast-forwards, moments in her life that have not yet happened but will. Through learning the language of the Heptapods, Louise's brain had actually been rewired to give her the ability to perceive time in a non-linear way. This concept is supported by the Sapir-Whorf Theory, which theorizes that the specific language(s) you know and understand is crucial to what shapes and alters each person's thoughts and cognition. In a paper for MIT, Benjamin Lee Whorf (creator of the Sapir-Whorf Theory) argues the power of language when he writes: "We have the same word for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed hard like ice, slushy snow, wind-driven flying snow—whatever the situation may be... To an Eskimo, this all-inclusive word would be almost unthinkable; he would say that falling snow, slushy snow, and so on, are sensuously and operationally different, different things to contend with; he uses different words for them and for other kinds of snow", referring to this as an example of what is called "linguistic relativity".[1] Although it's highly unlikely a language can ever grant you with the ability to see the future like Louise's experiences did, a study had been done by linguist Lera Boroditsky showing that members of the Pormpuraaw Aboriginal tribe think about time passing differently than English speakers because their language relates to cardinal directions instead of from left to right,[2] proving that language really can ultimately hold a powerful influence on your cognition. This science-fiction movie takes this concept to a whole other level, as Louise is literally gifted with the ability to see her life laid out in its entirety once she becomes fluent with the language of the Heptapods.

Once Louise learns the language which causes her to realize her eventual fate— that she will marry Ian and have a child with him who will end up to inevitably die at a young age which causes Ian to leave her, she is clearly left with many choices. She can avoid this and prevent herself from the sorrow of losing both her future daughter and husband, which will take her back to who she once was before her journey started— in a place where she remained neither happy nor sad, just living on day to day. Or... Louise can choose to accept love and happiness into her life, even if she knows it will be temporary, even if she knows she will be left with hurt. When Louise embraces Ian in the final scene, it is clear what choice she's made.

It is apparent that the plot of this film taps into heavy themes of psychology and philosophy, more specifically toying with the teachings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, specifically his concept on "being-towards-death." In *Being and Time*, Heidegger acknowledges the inevitability of death and claims we are not truly able to live our lives out to its highest potential as human beings until we realize and accept our mortality.[3] To understand our finitude is how we can begin to find happiness. Heidegger also states the difference between an authentic understanding of being-towards-death versus an inauthentic one, or what he calls the "they-self". It is obvious that we all know everyone will eventually die, but it is difficult to really grasp the fact that we ourselves will die. A they-self may understand that death is imminent, but will only generalize this and think of everyone else's death. To go from they-self to an authentic self means having to individualize this fact and see your own death as actual and very real to you, and Heidegger calls this awakening of consciousness or transition an "anticipatory resoluteness". Louise's journey in *Arrival* is an example of this transition from a they-self to an authentic self. Although she obviously has always known that death occurs to everyone, it's clear through the way she was living in the beginning of the film that she wasn't yet able to individualize her inevitable death. Louise is unable to realize the finitude of her life until she learns the language of the Heptapods and is then gifted with the ability to see time as non-linear and discover her future daughter's fate. Through her daughter's sickness, she is then truly able to identi-

fy death as something that is hers and will actually be hers. not just everyone else's. Her "anticipatory resoluteness" causes her to reach what is considered her authentic self in Heidegger's theory and teaches her the importance of living her life to the fullest through truly and really understanding the imminence of death. Louise knows her husband will leave her. She knows her daughter will die young. She knows she will eventually end up alone, the way she started, through all of this. However, she still chooses to be with him, to start a family, and to love them anyways even knowing what is to come. Once she truly understands just how fragile and short her own life is, she is finally able to experience her own "being-towards-death" and begin to live her life with substance and meaning.

Arrival came to me at a very pivotal turning point in my life. Upon spending the majority of my youth in stagnation, preventing myself from being

tually fail, but she understands the moments in between mean more than the outcome— so I'd rather face everything head on, to choose love, than dwell in fear and keep everything at arms length just to avoid getting hurt. Upon watching this film, my life was sincerely changed for the better. As these past two years have gone by since discovering Arrival, I have vowed to live life with more vulnerability and put trust in both myself and forces outside of me, hoping for the best of experiences but also understanding a bad one will ultimately still hold more semblance than not having any at all. Now at 19 years old, I can confidently say I've learned the importance in opening myself up to both opportunities and people, choosing to live life with my heart on my sleeve, and remembering to never take any day or moment for granted, all thanks to a film that I initially thought would be just another generic, sci-fi film.

The complexity of Arrival raises the bar for

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able to really experience life due to fear and apathy just like Louise did, watching this movie and seeing Louise experience her "anticipatory resoluteness" was what caused me to go through my own "anticipatory resoluteness". Louise's experiences have forced me to face the temporality and preciousness of my own life, causing me to also make choices differently based on the realizations of my epiphany, just like she did. Although, unlike her, I am ultimately clueless to the specific events that will unfold in the span of my lifetime, I understand that despite everything I too will endure moments of pain as well as moments of bliss and happiness and all of the emotions in between. I will love and hurt and laugh and cry. With every potential relationship, whether platonic or romantic, I know that there will always be a possibility of it ending with failure. Louise too knows her relationships will even-

the potential of the abundance of thematic elements that can possibly be explored in the genre of science-fiction. There are so many aspects in this film that help set it apart from other movies in its genre, and its deeper layers reminds viewers that science-fiction, when done well, can be more than just aliens, spaceships, and CGI, and despite the genre's fantastical and fictitious elements, these films can still have the power to connect to audiences on a deeper, personal level. Lucasfilm's Chief Creative Officer John Knoll explains that "the best science fiction gives you an opportunity to explore philosophical and moral themes. There are often societal problems that are very emotionally loaded ... [but] if you ... recast them in a science fiction setting, [and are thus] looking at a more novel situation, then you can leave some of those preconceived notions behind and ... reevalu-

at[e] it anew. [This] may cause you to rethink your position on the terrestrial version of that problem."[4]

Take another movie such as Annihilation for example, directed by Alex Garland and released in 2018, just two years after Arrival. Annihilation's plot is centered around a team of female scientists on a mission to enter a strange and supernatural area of land called "Area X" filled with mutating landscapes and creatures. Despite these two films' obvious surface similarities such as both being eerie sci-fi films played by A-list movie stars with a plot based around a woman tasked by the government to solve a specific supernatural issue, there is much more these films have in common that meets the eye. Annihilation also proves to have a lot to say on humanity, psychology, and the meaning of life. With both of these films, it seems less concerned with what happens, the outcome, who dies, who lives, or if the protagonists' missions are ever ultimately successful, but more focused on the characters' journeys itself and what they learn and how they grow from it. The lessons that these characters learn in the end hold more significance than the missions they go on, as it turns out that their journeys are what pushes them to face their personal demons and release their emotional baggage, which is therefore what leads both stories to hold much more humanistic and philosophical themes.

Another aspect of these films that separates them from others in their genre is the fact that they are both female-led films. For so long, with films like Star Wars, Avatar, or The Terminator, science fiction has been a genre that's been proven to be heavily dominated by men. Brogan

Morris writes that "these 'post-human' roles have their own ideas about female agency and sexuality, but ultimately all come to the same conclusion in one respect: that to be woman is to be much more than the form society often tries to reduce her to."[5] However, it's not solely the inclusion of women itself that makes these films powerful, rather it's how common, tiring tropes in science fiction can be abandoned and how stories can become more powerful through its inclusion of a female-led protagonist or cast. In Annihilation and Arrival, these films feel like a breath of fresh air because its stories are not driven by overdone plotlines and their protagonists don't go through the same character arcs from the likes of their male counterparts that at this point seem way too overdone. Michael Sun states that these sci-fi films starring a female protagonist are significant because "They're free from the shlocky[shocking] violence and clumsy romance subplots demanded by their testosterone-fuelled counterparts, and they have the space to properly develop complex worlds and ideas."[6]

Arrival is a film that taught me to really never judge a book (or in this case, a movie) by its cover, caused me to begin respecting modern science-fiction cinema as more than just CGI-overload and overdone plotlines, and more importantly shifted my perspective and appreciation for my own life for the better. Ultimately, this film has set the precedent of just how powerful this genre can be when done right, and has marked a turning point for the future and potential of science-fiction in regards to inclusion, humanistic connections, and philosophical and psychological themes.

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Films are an international language. Film is engaging, idiomatic, and accessible. The emotional power of film is able to transcend differences in the time period and culture. Horror may not be the first example that comes to mind regarding film's international appeal, but these films do use both subtle and explicit forms of societal and interpersonal unease to scare us, directly borrowing these concepts from previous films in the drama genre. In particular, the films *Parasite* and *Get Out* gained notoriety at a time when wealth disparity was enlarged, race issues were prominent, and riots and protests were occurring globally. Two older films— *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Spartacus* — can be compared to these contemporary examples, as they were made to comment on wealth inequality and alienation of cultures. The motifs and themes in these films reflect the cultural, economic, and political struggles of the average person during the films' respectives time periods.

Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite* focuses largely on family, social class, and social mobility. Parasite is about a poor family, the Kim's, infiltrating a rich family, the Park's, by posing as unrelated employees. Stairs are prominent in many shots. They're the exit of the Kim's basement apartment and the entrance to the Park's lavish house. The lighting placed at the top of the Park's stairs emphasizes their importance by equating the top of the stairs with accomplishing one's goals. When Ki-woo, the son of the Kim family, first leaves the apartment to attend a job interview with the Park's, he mentions that his goal is to eventually graduate from a university. Education is a way to escape poverty because it provides social mobility as mirrored by Ki-woo's dialogue and placement in relation to the stairs. The same applies to marriage or dating; Ki-woo also mentions that if he were to marry into the Park family, their wealth would be shared with him. For the Park patriarch Park Dong-ik, he climbs stairs as he enters his house everyday after coming home from work. Unbeknownst to the audience at first, it is Oh Geun-sae, a poor man living in the Park's basement, who "automatically" turns on the lights of the house as Dong-ik enters. Park Dong-ik is able to rise through the ranks by metaphorically taking advantage of the lower-classes' situational vulnerabilities. This is also pointed out by the rainstorm that both the Park and Kim family have to endure in very contrasting situations. The Park's have the luxury to return to their house and enjoy the following sunny day, while the Kim's house is flooded.

The lack of class solidarity between the Kim's, Oh Geun-sae, and his wife Moon-gwang (the ex-housekeeper), is what made the film truly horrifying. There is a scene where the Kim family is sitting and enjoying dinner in the Park's living room. The Kim's take a moment to reflect on how they were able to secure their jobs by taking it from their predecessors. One of the more explicit displays of class traitorism is when the father, Ki-Taek, attempts to absolve himself of his guilt in firing the chauffeur. Ki-Taek makes the assumption that the chauffeur must have had another job lined up before he was even fired, which is quickly pushed aside by his daughter, Ki-jeong, who yells that he should care more about his own family. Ki-taek is the only one who expresses concern for the people they had gotten fired. The lack of compassion, solidarity, and empathy from his family is one of the most frightening concepts in the entire film.

Jordan Peele's *Get Out* focuses on interracial tension, social class, and the subversion of horror film tropes. The film is about Chris, a black man who meets the rich family of Rose, his white girlfriend. The family is odd and patronizing towards Chris while claiming to have a progressive mindset, which he finds disconcerting. He eventually finds out that the family transplants their brains into younger black bodies to attain youth and immortality, while the host's consciousness stays trapped in somewhere called the Sunken Place. This fantastical version of white colonization is used by Peele to comment on interracial tensions in modern America. As author Aja Romano puts it, Peele frames violent black resistance as a necessity, white feminism as a lie, code switching as a tool, and microaggressions as dehumanizing.[1] But horror is systemically tied to class as well. Intersectionality between race and class is a subject meaningful to the discussion of the wealth disparity in America. The Sunken Place is representative of the system that silences marginalized people. According to Jordan Peele, it "exists not just for black people, but for women, for our Latino brothers and sisters, for any marginalized group that gets told not to say what they're experiencing."[2] This is also a system that keeps marginalized communities in poverty. Peele comments further on America's corrupt system by subverting horror tropes, and thus societal expectations, which is a subtle way of undermining their power. One instance of this is Peel's denial of the "white savior." Instead of saving Chris, Rose turns out to be evil just like the rest of the white family. Furthermore, Chris is not the typical "African American who gets killed first" character prominent in horror films. He reacts to his situation appropriately and doesn't "mindlessly stick around and wait for their death like many do in horror movies," thus giving his character agency that is sorely lacking both in film and in the real life power dynamics of

America.[3]

Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* focuses on structured power dynamics, what it means for the wealthy to have power, and what wealth can do to a mindset. The cinematography visually expresses these themes and the story focuses on rebellion against oppressive authority. The film is about a Roman slave named Spartacus who leads a slave rebellion against the Roman Republic, while Crassus, a Roman senator, becomes a dictator to crush the slave army. In terms of cinematography, there are many shots that show Crassus from a low angle to make him look larger than he actually is. This is visually metaphorical for his position in Roman society as he is completely in charge of those around him. Spartacus and the other slaves are typically shot straight on or from a slightly high angle when they're in an arena. Even the lodgings of the gladiators-in-training are below ground. The cinematography emphasizes the difference between the wealthy and the slaves, not just in power but in mindset. Spartacus believes in freedom for all slaves, understands the importance of community, and recognizes his own faults in order to learn from them. Crassus believes in violently oppressing the lower class, that money can buy love, and that power is all that is important. Ultimately, Crassus wins and has Spartacus crucified, but there is a lingering doubt about the Empire's future stability while the martyred Spartacus' dignity is solidified.

Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* contains dystopian themes and motifs regarding the loss of individual autonomy, infiltration, and hysteria. The film is about an extraterrestrial invasion in the fictional California town of Santa Mira by alien seed pods that can duplicate replacement copies of humans but are fully devoid of human emotion. As the seed-pod people began taking over Santa Mira, the primary concern of the main characters'— Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy— is their loss of autonomy. Without hesitation, they try to survive instead of giving in. Once Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy learn that their emotions are the things keeping them apart from the extraterrestrials, they grow even more unwilling to let themselves become seed-pod people. To the protagonists, group think-

ing and loss of emotion denotes loss of individual autonomy.

The most notable element of the extraterrestrial invasion is that it is a slow and subtle infiltration of society. It started with someone's uncle, slowly crept towards another family, then multiplied. By the time Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy discovered something was wrong, it was too late – the entire town except them had been converted. The elimination of people that can be trusted is extremely frightening, and is expanded upon by Miles. He believes that the Santa Mira seed-pod people's plan is to repeat the process in other towns all across the United States. These concepts of infiltration and loss of individual autonomy lead to hysteria and paranoia in the main characters, especially when Miles calls the FBI and CIA but no one picks up. He expresses his concern about whether the extraterrestrials had already gotten a hold of the government. Miles and Becky are left with more questions than answers.

Parasite, *Spartacus*, and *Get Out* are reflective of the dominant capitalist society in both Korea and the United States. With the American films *Spartacus* and *Get Out,* the capitalist economy is something that transcends time; whether it's the 1950's or 2010's, capitalism has always been a backdrop. According to author Brian X. Chang, the wealth disparity in Korea and the United States decreases the strength of the middle class, further dampens the low-income, and favors the rich.[4] The supposed mixed economy is still more dominantly capitalist than socialist. This difference allows for wealth disparity and for a lack of socioeconomic mobility, symbolized by the stairs in *Parasite*. No socioeconomic mobility means a cycle of wealth or poverty, mentioned in *Get Out.* In *Parasite* and *Spartacus*, Kim Ki-taek and Spartacus are attempting to escape their income situations and better their lives. *Parasite* offers marriage and education as an escape, but the characters resort to a single yet extreme act of violence to demonstrate their hatred of the system they live in. *Spartacus* offered gladiator school as an escape, but Spartacus chooses to rebel against the entire oppressive system.

Parasite and *Spartacus* prominently display the usurping of the lower class against the wealthy elite. Once tensions mount, the people of the lower class get fed up with the system that has them chained up— metaphorically and literally— to an unhappy and impoverished life. The fact that these films have their protagonists choose a violent route emphasizes the social tension when living in these economies. After a certain period of time, civilians will get fed up with the system that oppresses them and will choose to overthrow the system by any means necessary. The longer civilians are kept under an oppressive hypercapitalist system, the more likely the protests against such a system are to be violent. *Parasite* and *Get Out* echo the socioeconomic protests taking place globally in places such as Chile, the United States, Lebanon, and France to name a few.

Something that all four films touched on was the need for a community or family to help the protagonists escape their situations. *Get Out* reflects current American social and cultural behaviors in that we see a chosen family for an African American man and an actual family for the white family. An African American man having a chosen family is especially reflective of American intersectionality in terms of race and class, and academic papers have found this is because "minority racial groups are more likely to experience multidimensional poverty than their White counterparts."[5] Because these groups are in poverty, "poorer parents have less time and fewer resources to invest in their children," which means low-income children are more likely to seek out external support and adopt a chosen family or have a closer bond with their friends.[6] *Get Out* shows that the support of the chosen family surpasses the power of wealth that the white family has. *Spartacus* also emphasizes the power of chosen family. Spartacus starts off isolated and alone but with the unification of his gladiator friends, he's able to build a thriving community and start a family of his own. Meanwhile, Crassus sits on his throne with a backstabbing and hostile Senate as the closest thing he has to family. Crassus craves familial bonds so much that he takes Spartacus's wife for his own.

Parasite shows every family sticking together. The lack of class solidarity means that familial bonds are the strongest such as when the two siblings, Kim Ki-jung and Kim Ki-woo, go so far as to get the Park's chauffeur and housekeeper fired in order to secure jobs for their parents. The Kim's familial support for each other transcends class solidarity. *Body Snatchers* doesn't highlight family, but a tight-knit group of friends. Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy trust each other, and together attempt to escape the allegory for political and societal dissonance that is the invasion of the extraterrestrials. With racial and economic tensions rising, *Parasite* and *Get Out* show that community is essential if the current protests are to achieve their goals. *Body Snatchers* and *Spartacus* had the slow collapse of their community, an allegory for McCarthyism and second Red Scare of the 1950's. However, it is with everyone's participation in their respective definition of community in each film, that there are survivors in every ending. All four films have a family or community that the protagonist can rely on when things get tough, a concept which transcends racial and cultural boundaries.

All four films also create a sense of cultural and economic "otherness." In *Get Out* and *Parasite*, the main protagonists of the films retain small habits and behaviors that are reminiscent of their backgrounds. Chris Washington treats people in the white space he's entered differently than how he talks to Rob Williams, his black best friend, drawing a cultural and racial boundary between them and the rest of the characters. In the living room scene in *Parasite*, Ki-woo and his family kept their behavior of eating together around a table instead of assimilating and eating dinner in their own respective places in the house, like the Park family typically did. Culturally, the Park's and Kim's families are different from each other, but the line is blurred as the film continues. That line between the Kim family and their lower class neighbors is redrawn in the scene when Oh Geun-sae finally comes up from the basement for his revenge. The harsh reality that the Kim family cannot masquerade as wealthy hits them, finalizing the theme of economic othering.

Similarly, Spartacus has an understand-

ing of community and empathy that can't be understood by the upper-class. Crassus gets visibly upset that Spartacus has something he will most likely never have and he's upset at the alienation it's caused him. The lack of understanding that correlates with wealth is what draws the line between Spartacus and his comrades and the wealthy others. In *Body Snatchers*, there is literal alienation. There are the four main characters that are left in their hysteria to survive and have to stick to their humanity in order to differentiate between themselves and the seed-pod, groupthinking, emotionless others. From *Parasite* and *Get Out's* visual segregation of culture, race, and class that highlights the socioeconomic disparity currently festering internationally to *Body Snatchers* and *Spartacus'* allegorical and divisive line between economic and political fears in America in the 1950's, a frightful othering and real reflection of the time period the films were made in is created.

Another incredibly important element to the social themes tackled in these films is The Second Red Scare. The Second Red Scare took place from 1947-1957 and it was a fear-driven event started by anti-communist politicians at the top of the government. McCarthyism, or an accusation of treason without evidence, eventually trickled down and became a fear of the everyday American. *Spartacus* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were released while the phenomena was occuring. Many film critics were able to read the films as responses to the fear stricken society. In *Body Snatchers,* the "ability of the aliens to 'pass' as ordinary beings is related to fears of Communist infiltration, subversion, and domination."[7] Due to the rising tension, many filmmakers thought to be Communists were blacklisted from Hollywood. *Spartacus'* screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo, was one of these blacklisted filmmakers. "*Spartacus* was the historical proof that these people could rise and menace any society which had wealthy employers and mistreated employees" with Rome as a metaphor for affluent America.[8] *Parasite* and *Get Out* also have narratives about the current economic and political situation. Parallels can be drawn to how frightening today's use of the word "socialism" is to how frightening "communism" was in the 1950's simply because both words threaten the hypercapitalist reality that has transcended race, time, and culture.

Films are able to make significant social, political, and economic commentary using textual and visual language. The motifs and themes in all of the aforementioned films reflect the dominant sociopolitcal and socioeconomic ideologies during the films' respectives time periods. *Parasite* and *Get Out* highlight America's enlarged wealth disparity, international responses to these differences in wealth, and the cultural impact. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Spartacus* took different approaches to comment on the Second Red Scare in the 1950's, especially regarding alienation due to social class or a literal difference of species. Each film has retained its entertainment value as well as political commentary, with *the Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* and *Spartacus* making bold statements to pave the way for *Parasite* and *Get Out's* future impact on the society and the film industry.

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