

***STUDIES***  
***IN***  
***POPULAR***  
***CULTURE***

39.2  
SPRING 2017

## STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE

*Studies in Popular Culture*, a journal of the Popular Culture Association in the South, publishes articles on popular culture however mediated through film, literature, radio, television, music, graphics, print, practices, associations, events—any of the material or conceptual conditions of life. Its contributors from the United States, Australia, Canada, China, England, Finland, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Scotland, Spain, and the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus include distinguished anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, cultural geographers, ethnomusicologists, historians, and scholars in comics, communications, film, games, graphics, literature, philosophy, religion, and television.

Direct editorial queries and submissions by email to editor Lynnette Porter, [porterly@erau.edu](mailto:porterly@erau.edu); mailing address: Humanities and Communication Department, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 600 South Clyde Morris Boulevard, Daytona Beach, Florida 32114. *Studies in Popular Culture* accepts submissions on all forms of popular culture (American or international) studied from the perspective of any discipline.

Queries are welcome. Manuscript submissions should be sent via email as Microsoft Word attachments (author's surname in the file name). Submissions typically total 5000 to 7500 words, including notes and bibliography. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman font. Please note that the editing process may result in revisions that lengthen the essay. *SPC* is indexed in the annual MLA International Bibliography, and MLA documentation is required. Authors should secure all necessary copyright permissions before submitting material. *SPC* uses blind peer review. The editor reserves the right to make stylistic changes on accepted manuscripts. A multidisciplinary journal, *SPC* gives preference to submissions that demonstrate familiarity with the body of scholarly work on popular culture but avoid the jargon associated with certain single-discipline studies.

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*In memory of George Whatley*, a founder and early president of the Popular Culture Association in the South, the editor and editorial board of *Studies in Popular Culture* annually recognize the article published in SPC that in their view best represents the scholarly values Professor Whatley sought for the organization and the study of popular culture.

**The 2016 Whatley Award winner is**

**The Circus and Early Cinema:  
Gravity, Narrative, and Machines**

**by**

**Helen Stoddert  
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## *From the Editor*

“Every individual has a place in the world and is important in some respect whether he chooses to be so or not.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne

As an editor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I feel compelled to revise Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 19<sup>th</sup> century statement: All individuals have a place in the world and are important in some respect, whether they choose to be so or not. The degree of inclusiveness, given this rhetorical change, may have increased, but the truth of Hawthorne’s meaning remains the same. Individuals play an important role in popular culture, as the articles in this issue illustrate.

Too often, popular culture may be perceived only as the culture of the masses, with themes, trends, or fads worth further analysis. However, as this issue’s authors illustrate, a closer look at individuals--whether real people or characters created for television or film--can be an intriguing microcosm within the larger picture. Thus, when Daniela Mastrocola analyzes a classless neo-liberal “middle class” or even the television series *Gilmore Girls*, she also focuses on two characters: daughter Lorelai and mother Emily Gilmore. Of course, these characters interact with each other and additional characters and reflect trends in real-world culture, but, individually, Lorelai and Emily are worthy of analysis, and each provides viewers with hours of entertainment. So, too, when Savanna Teague describes trends among horror cinema’s “survivor girls”--those plucky young women who stave off a creepy stalker/murderer--she further narrows the discussion to one survivor girl, Taylor Gentry, in *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*. Teague illustrates how Gentry both represents a long history of survivor girls and defies the expected categorization. In this issue, Lorelai Gilmore, Emily Gilmore, and Taylor Gentry remind viewers that making sense out of overarching themes or understanding the defining characteristics of a movement or trend is only part of the significance of popular culture. Individual characters resonate with viewers or stand out in personal or cultural importance. Whether they--or their creators--intend to (choose to), these individuals have changed the cultural landscape of film and television.

Lynn Koller’s analysis of the way that technology shapes lives and has become an addictive addition also underscores the real-life horror

of a stalker/murderer. Her article delineates the technological evidence provided by cell phones to track a killer and, in the process, reveals the obsessive importance placed on smartphones in two individuals' lives. The way that the killer relied on technology and, conversely, the way that technology led to his conviction show the importance of one individual's experience in setting legal and law enforcement precedents.

Not all individuals' influence has such legally significant consequences. Like all authors, former baseball commissioner Ford Frick wanted to share his perspective with a wider audience. The one-time newspaper reporter chose to write a novel, *Big Leaguer*, that explains and exposes elements of the game he loved. However, few have been aware of the unfinished novel, a problem that John Carvalho and John Lofflin seek to remedy with their article. Frick's unique insight into baseball and its sometimes sordid past provides an insider's now-historic viewpoint, and Carvalho and Lofflin's article offers an overview of baseball literature while homing in on Frick's personal history as both a writer and a baseball commissioner.

Matthew Elliott also looks at individuals in history, but he focuses on genealogy television shows and the way they handle the "big reveal" of an inconvenient ancestor whose life does not conform to current societal expectations or norms. As Elliott notes, by going back even a few generations an individual has dozens of equally direct ancestors, yet television series like *Finding Your Roots* typically choose to emphasize only one during an episode. When this ancestor inconveniently turns out to be a slaveholder, for example, the descendant may have difficulty incorporating that element of family affiliation into his or her self-identity. Even more than the other articles in this issue, Elliott's raises the question of how much influence one individual can or should have on another, especially if the two are separated by decades or centuries. Similarly, this issue underscores the significance that one person in fiction or real life, past or present, may have in others' lives and within the culture at large.

As Hawthorne wrote nearly two centuries ago, the power of individuals, even unintentionally, can have a profound effect on the world. The authors of this issue's articles highlight the many ways in which that singular influence may mold popular culture and our understanding of it.

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## **Book Reviews**

### **An invitation to potential reviewers and authors**

Any scholar who wishes to review a book should contact the Book Reviews Editor, Clare Douglass Little, at

DOUGLAC2@erau.edu

Those whose work is unfamiliar to the editor may wish to send a CV or describe relevant reviewing experience within a discipline. Reviewers may suggest a book to be reviewed or request to be assigned one from among those sent to the editor.

Members of the Popular Culture Association in the South who have recently published a book are also invited to inform the Book Reviews Editor.

Reviews should be approximately 500-700 words and should be emailed as a Microsoft Word attachment. The contributor's surname should be in the file name. In some cases, review essays of 1,000-1,200 words may be assigned. Queries are welcome.

## Performing Class: *Gilmore Girls* and a Classless Neoliberal “Middle Class”

Daniela Mastrocola

Within its first episode, *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) foregrounds a class-based conflict, articulated as a generational tension between the show’s two primary families, the senior Gilmores, Emily and Richard (Kelly Bishop and Edward Herrman), and the “Gilmore girls,” their daughter, Lorelai (Lauren Graham) and granddaughter, Rory (Alexis Bledel). In many respects, this conflict serves as the series’ primary narrative propellant: for example, Lorelai, the protagonist, must leave her chosen life in the quirky, colorful world of Stars Hollow and return to the symmetrical, monochromatic world of her parents’ house in Hartford, Connecticut, to beg them to pay for her daughter’s private school tuition.<sup>1</sup> During this episode, audiences learn that Lorelai left her parents’ wealthy household at the age of seventeen with her then one-year-old daughter to escape the restrictions of an upper-class lifestyle (“Pilot”). Lorelai takes refuge in Stars Hollow, working for room-and-board as a maid at the Independence Inn, where she has become the manager fifteen years later, when the series begins. Despite the importance of class to the series’ narrative arc, it is surprisingly difficult to definitively characterize Lorelai’s class membership.

Celine-Marie Pascale’s work on common sense notions of class provides a generative framework through which to make sense of Lorelai’s ambiguous class membership and, more broadly, to understand how the characters’ performances of class identities normalize hegemonic discourses that obfuscate the material consequences of wealth and income inequalities. Her insights are brought to bear upon the analysis of the two Gilmore matriarchs, Emily and Lorelai. These characters are presented as near-total opposites in terms of their individual and relative relationships to the common indicators of class (wealth, occupation, and lifestyle); concentrating this analysis on Emily and Lorelai thus serves

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to explicate the narrative devices and internal logic according to which the program relationally articulates class categories.

Beginning with Emily, audiences encounter a character who definitively displays the wealth and privileges of a member of upper-class high society, both economically and culturally. Because the show distorts class categories, overemphasizing their symbolic qualities (e.g., tastes, lifestyle), audiences are encouraged to feel pity for Emily: she is constrained by upper-class notions of proper etiquette that make her pretentious and unable to express authentic emotions or forge intimate relationships. By contrast, Lorelai's class membership is performed with an ambiguous freedom. Her symbolic displays of class affiliation—including her knowledge of popular culture, cosmetic eccentricities, and absurd junk-food eating habits—make her appear ordinary in terms of approachability and connection to the real world. Economically, she acts as though she can shed the privileges of her wealthy upbringing and embody the image of an autonomous, self-made entrepreneur. However, her allegiance to a poverty of choice (rather than necessity) and upward mobility, which is achieved off screen such that the audience never sees the type of labor involved in this process, obfuscate the recognizability of her class membership. This performance distracts from the possibility that she could be part of a broader social class or engage in class solidarity. This analysis closes by highlighting a momentary rupture in the series' otherwise fantastical construction of Lorelai's neoliberal middle-class image, when she is confronted with a working class humiliation and the economic limits of her symbolic freedom: the structural foundation of her home has been compromised by a termite infestation, and she is unable to find a bank that will lend her money for the repair. Here, a primary focus on interpersonal dynamics and a celebratory depiction of individual autonomy and resilience displaces a critique of the structural sources and material consequences of wealth inequality and, therefore, the value of class consciousness.

### **Re-class-ifying Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism, characterized broadly as the “ideological software” for global capitalism (Peck and Tickell 389), expounds

the alleged death of class; according to this mode of social organization, professional success and material security are the responsibility of private individuals. This logic renders useless any notion of class consciousness--that is, awareness of one's place and degree of agency within broader socioeconomic and political structures, especially as it relates to those who hold a similar place. State resources are increasingly directed at facilitating trade and economic growth, while social services are diminished, if not eliminated, especially if they are perceived as a hindrance to free market privatization. In contrast with the so-called "golden age of capitalism," wherein the welfare state intervened in the market in order to redistribute wealth and protect the working class, albeit to a limited extent (McClintock and Stanfield), *neoliberalism* signals the commodification of all public and social goods: "It is the ideology of the period in which capitalism deepened to embrace the production of social life itself, seeking to commoditize the most intimate of human relations and the production of identity and personhood" (Gledhill 340). It fosters a citizen-as-consumer subjectivity that encourages individuals to purchase displays of wealth as evidence of individual success and social membership, while denying structural sources of poverty and inequality. The individual is a self-produced entrepreneur, and the failure to achieve financial security or the life of her choosing is her fault (Walkerline). Labor and laboring conditions, so far as they are addressed, are celebrated for providing autonomy and upward mobility to deserving subjects who embrace this philosophy of individualism (Grabowski).

Contemporary Marxists have taken up the challenge of resurrecting and redefining notions of class and class consciousness, such that the idea of a working or systemically exploited and underprivileged class may serve as a meaningful basis upon which to capture the pain and injustices caused by wealth inequality and mobilize resistance to the widespread violence of market fundamentalism. In the United States, the working class includes a majority of Americans who work for a living but have little control over their lives, are subject to routine exploitation in their working environments, and may experience periods of under- and unemployment (Zweig). In addition to income, class is also defined

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in relation to occupation (e.g., manual or service, management or ownership), education, and lifestyle or taste (including how one spends income) (Ehrenreich; Leistyna). In other words, the contours of class are sketched in relation to economic and cultural dimensions, in all cases with contextual specificity. Attention to this combination of factors appears best suited to account for the types of options and opportunities afforded or denied to different groups with, for example, greater or smaller incomes and more or less education.

In order to understand how *Gilmore Girls* contributes to the broad public discourse about classlessness in contemporary America, the representation of the series' ambiguously-classed protagonist must be analyzed in relation to both these material and cultural markers of class. An overemphasis on the *signification* of class affiliation may encourage a distorted reading of class that is reduced to practices of consumption, particularly with regards to taste and lifestyle. For example, even in poor American communities, one finds cheap, knock-off displays of middle- and upper-class wealth, often purchased with credit (Ewen 24-73; Pascale 357). Purchasing such displays of wealth--for example, a home, car, entertainment, or clothing--may shield working class individuals from the continued stigmatization of poverty (Leistyna). This may, in turn, reinforce the individualist mantra of personal success, to the extent that one's ability to display wealth is used as a measure of personal achievement, regardless of working conditions or financial security. This perpetuates the notion that class is no longer a useful basis upon which to organize *resistance*: under these conditions, "It's much more commonsensical that we think of ourselves as individual members of an imaginary middle-class rather than collective members of a working class" (Gray). In other words, the symbolic articulation of class may bear little resemblance to one's economic position but may nonetheless be used to project an image of individual achievement that reinforces a supposed middle-class identity or, by virtue of middle-class ubiquity, classlessness.

This may explain why a majority of Americans define themselves as simultaneously classless or belonging to an elusive but much lauded middle class, despite worsening economic and labor

conditions (Asner). For example, conservative estimates indicate that at least sixty-one percent of Americans self-identified as middle class between 2000 and 2008, during the time *Gilmore Girls* aired (Newport). However, forty-nine percent of the American population is poor or low income, based on current government poverty rates, and seventy-nine percent live in danger of poverty or unemployment (“Current US Poverty Statistics”). A disjuncture between the displayed and economic bases of class may reinforce a separation between subjective and objective measurements of one’s position within the broader economic logic—chiefly, how one displays wealth or affinity to a social class, on one hand, and autonomy over working conditions and material existence, on the other. Neoliberalism’s female subjects, in particular, are encouraged “to look the part, sound the part and . . . make themselves and their homes over to conform to this middle-class aesthetic” (Walkerline 242). This is coupled with the stigmatization of a working class identity: as Robin Kelley remarks, “Somehow, in this [American] culture, being working class is a failure.” Taken together, these factors make a classless identity seem not only logical but desirable. It also perpetuates neoliberal notions of social mobility, to the extent that people can purchase displays of wealth that mask their poverty and distract from the value of class consciousness for the improvement of working conditions.

Pascale’s study of the subjective measurements of class in America is a prime case in point. In her effort to understand how class has been made to appear irrelevant, she speaks to diverse individuals about how they self-classify. Many of her interviewees define themselves as middle class or classless, despite huge variations in income and asset ownership (Pascale 350). For example, four of her five multimillionaire participants defend their middle-class status with reference to those elements of class commonly associated with notions of cultural and social capital: those with whom they maintain relationships, the type of leisure activities in which they participate, and their economic origins (for example, if they began poor and acquired assets later in life). They also distance themselves from an upper-class label, not on an economic basis, but because they do not feel themselves to exhibit the “pretentiousness”

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of upper-class lifestyles, while admitting that they enjoy leisure activities like “yachting and extensive world travel” (Pascale 350-351). For those with significantly less (or no) income or asset ownership, Pascale’s study shows a middle-class or classless identity (or both) is asserted on the basis of being ordinary (like everyone, as in the majority “in the middle”), and the self-identification of class is positioned in non-economic terms (e.g., based on ethnic or cultural affiliations), avoiding the stigmatization of poverty (354-375).

Because her participants were drawn primarily from the ways they display class, rather than typical economic measurements (e.g., median household income), Pascale proposes that “Class must be understood as performative” and that “the everyday ‘doing of class’ and the hegemonic discursive formations upon which such doing relies, disorganizes the recognizable presence of wealth and poverty and effectively subvert[s] the capacity for collective identity based on class interests” (349). In other words, she argues that addressing *how* Americans perform and experience their class identities is a generative means by which to understand how economic measurements of class have receded so thoroughly to the far corners of common sense discourse in the U.S., so as to make class categories appear objectively meaningless. It draws attention to, in Walkerdine’s words, how and why “the neoliberal subject is the autonomous liberal subject made in the image of the middle-class” despite objective increases in poverty and wealth inequality (239). Because opportunities for social mobility are allegedly equally available to all people, it makes little sense to speak of (semi) static social classes that categorize one’s place in relation to external systems and structures--systems and structures which, in fact, constrain and/or enable individual and collective choices. Emptied of meaningful content, being middle class comes to mean and be experienced as classlessness. It is with this conception of a middle class that the remainder of the article proceeds to offer a critique of *Gilmore Girls*.<sup>2</sup>

The primary point of departure between this article and that of Pascale is the latter’s bypassing of objective measurements of wealth and class. In her words, “There is no place to stand that is outside ideology--there is no place of ‘true’ knowledge, on which

concepts of misrecognition and false consciousness rely” (Pascale 348). Instead, a realist position, more closely resembling that of Loic Wacquant, assumes that objective if entirely context-specific, fluid, and multifaceted measurements of wealth disparity exist and provide a basis for the evaluation of distortions in individual and collective perception. In other words, “The language of class is performative (i.e., constitutive)” but not independently so (Pascale 359). Those representations of class that silence its material consequences in favor of its discursive qualities are the focus of this article. Treating *Gilmore Girls* as a site of the discursive construction of class that can lend insight into this dominant political-economic logic is an effort to understand precisely how the series articulates the neoliberal image of an objectively classless but subjectively experienced middle class.

### Constructing a Classless Middle-class Fantasy

Throughout the series, class is constructed and expressed on the basis of interpersonal antagonisms between the two Gilmore family matriarchs, Emily and Lorelai. There is little doubt of Emily’s economic and cultural membership in upper-class high society. She and her husband live in a historic mansion furnished by expensive antiques. She is financially sustained by inherited wealth and her husband’s high-paying though ill-defined job in the insurance industry. In fact, during the episode “Help Wanted,” Lorelai presses to understand exactly what her father does at his international insurance consulting firm--*how* he labors--to which Emily vaguely though confidently responds, “He consults on matters relating to international insurance.” Clearly money is in large supply, and the details of its procurement are trivial. In terms of vehicular mobility, throughout the series audiences see Emily driving both a Mercedes and Jaguar; she also considers purchasing shares in a plane (“Come Home”; “Gilmore Girls Only”; “The Prodigal Daughter Returns”).

Culturally, Emily’s behavior is governed by notions of proper etiquette reminiscent of British aristocracy. She is President of the Daughters of the American Revolution and regularly orchestrates charity fundraisers. She associates primarily with other upper-class,

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white housewives with whom, for example, during an afternoon tea party, she contemplates which Founding Father would have made the best lover (“Fight Face”). Her behavior is also marked by an entitlement that she strives to pass onto future generations of upper-class wealth. When traveling with her granddaughter, she reminds her on multiple occasions to expect pampering from those in her employ: “Rory, I told you before, you do not move luggage” (“A Messenger, Nothing More”). Toward the end of the series, Emily leads a young girl through her initiation into high-society social etiquette, including which cutlery to use and the type of conversation to make around the dinner table, demonstrating her mastery of such skills: “Think of things in the middle three sections of the Sunday *New York Times* -- travel, arts and leisure, Sunday styles--and forget the rest of the paper exists!” (“Lorelai’s First Cotillion”). This highlighted component of her class membership is, however, depicted unfavorably.

Functioning as a proxy for other upper-class women, Emily figures as an emotionally stifled character who is unable to forge intimate relationships (Rossi 89). For example, she is unable to express hurt when her daughter withholds news about her engagement; instead, when Lorelai finally confesses, she replies curtly, “Well, I think that’s very nice. I certainly hope we’ll be in town for it, but if not I promise we’ll send a nice gift. Now excuse me, I’m going to check on the roast” (“Hammers and Veils”). Her adherence to social customs is continuously presented as a hindrance to her expression of authentic emotions; for example, when her husband’s business partner, Jason, dismisses her plans to organize a traditional launch party, she is obliged to hide her offense and hurt behind polite sarcasm (“An Affair to Remember”). While, as Matthew Nelson points out, many of the series’ upper-class characters are depicted as “arrogant, unlikable, and unpleasant” (204), Emily’s character also serves to invoke pity from the audience. Audiences are, therefore, shocked when, while drinking with her daughter, she momentarily displays an emotional vulnerability that stands in stark opposition to her usual highly composed demeanour. Viewers see a glimpse of resistance to the heteropatriarchy of her upper-class lifestyle as she laments the code of proper behaviour that

required she leave the financial management of her household to her husband:

Sure, I went to Smith, and I was a history major, but . . . I was always going to be a wife. I mean, the way I saw it, a woman's job was to run a home, organize the social life of a family, and bolster her husband while he earned a living. It was a good system, and it was working very well all these years. Only when your husband isn't there . . . you realize how dependent you are. ("I Am Kayak, Hear Me Roar")

This moment, however, passes quickly, suggesting that this display of vulnerability is owed entirely to her intoxication. In other words, the scene points to a systemic issue in the relationship between gender and financial dependence and then quickly retreats as Emily hastily dismisses the moment of exposure upon the sobriety of the next morning. While the moment may pass within the show, the broader economic realities to which it points do not--namely, how women of different economic classes are constrained by economic gender norms (granted, Emily's is not the most sympathetic of cases). The show leaves the issue unresolved without further investigation, much less any form of resolution.

In contrast to Emily's definitive display of upper-class membership, Lorelai's class membership is significantly harder to define as it is articulated primarily by comparison to that of Emily. In other words, it is suggested that Lorelai belongs to a lower or middle class largely because she does not exhibit the same indicators that are used to construct Emily's high-class membership. In some ways, this relational articulation of class is not surprising, given that "locating the middle class as a material and subjective experience requires [that] it be located both against others above and below it" (Walkowitz 122). However, within this series, this relational configuration projects an image of Lorelai as classless and thereby enables the series to dodge a sincere and direct engagement with the class inequalities to which it makes reference. Using relative terms and comparisons avoids dealing with the disparities in fixed wealth and working conditions and contributes to the

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misrecognition of self and others' class membership in a way that reinforces the ambiguous neoliberal notion of a middle class. Furthermore, Lorelai internalizes this relative logic in a way that allows her to claim a kind of impoverished credibility--as someone who "started with nothing" and overcame poverty by the show's conclusion, despite her wealthy roots ("To Live and Let Diorama").

To begin with, in contrast with the Gilmore mansion, Lorelai and Rory live in a two-bedroom household that Emily routinely criticizes ("Rory's Dance"; "That'll Do, Pig"). Although humble by comparison, it is hardly the picture of impoverishment. Inside it lacks no amenities, even if it is smaller, disorganized, and considerably more colorful. It is not a definitive picture of a working class home from, for example, *Married with Children* or *Roseanne*.<sup>3</sup> There are, nonetheless, a few subtle references to the challenges that Lorelai overcame while furnishing her house that remind viewers of her financial limitations, including brief mention of a second-hand bedroom set and a couch purchased on credit and paid for over many months ("The Prodigal Daughter Returns"; "That'll Do, Pig"). These moments of flirtation with a working class identity are, however, quickly obscured by a neoliberal middle-class image of personal freedom. For example, when Lorelai and her on-and-off-again boyfriend contemplate purchasing a nearby mansion, she opts not to, not because she lacks the funds or credit, but because of her sentimental attachment to her home ("Fight Face"). Lorelai also drives a Jeep Wrangler, which Emily disapprovingly describes as "an army vehicle" ("Gilmore Girls Only"), but which was, nonetheless, purchased as a new car with none of the rust, obnoxious sounds, or damage that one might expect of a woman who figures as comparatively poor with limited disposable income. As with her home, when her car breaks down during the final season--at which point she has become the co-owner of an inn with seemingly greater income--she acknowledges that she can now afford a more luxurious car but stays true to her chosen roots and, instead, purchases a replacement engine so she can keep the original car. She performs a kind of allegiance to the show's distorted image of an impoverished identity *by choice* ("It's Just Like Riding a Bike").

The primary point of class distinction between Emily and her daughter is that Lorelai is a waged laborer, managing the Independence Inn for the first half of the series, whereas Emily manages her household on the backs of women hired as maids. Indeed, Emily's management of her household is one of the primary sites upon which audiences encounter her dispositional failings as an entitled and exploitive member of the upper class. Her behavior exemplifies the pretentiousness from which Pascale's multimillionaire research participants seek to distance themselves (350). To begin, Emily demands a dehumanizing perfection from her maids while also taking credit for the fruits of their labor. For example, she insists that she deserves recognition for the preparation of meals, not because she actually cooked or served the food but because she commanded her maid's preparation of it: "*I* told her [the maid] to make it! You're enjoying duck because *I* requested duck!" ("So . . . Good Talk," emphasis added). Furthermore, she cycles through a new maid every episode because she holds unattainable expectations of her employees. During one episode, she is on the phone with her lawyer preparing to defend herself in court for firing a maid merely because the maid walked too loudly: "Every time she went to the pantry, I thought she was marching on Poland. Oh, I see, because I want things a certain way, I'm unreasonable?" ("I Solemnly Swear"). She displays the same expectation of total appeasement from her lawyer as she did the maid, insisting that the lawyer miss his daughter's dance recital to "turn [his] little near-luxury car around, go back to [his] office, and fax [her] that libelous scrap of paper" immediately. Beneath the comedic extremes of scenes like this are all the markings of class privilege that equate extreme wealth with increased value as a human being. However, because the scene is coated with humor and filtered through Emily's perspective, audiences never actually confront the pain and humiliation endured by her maids who are fired as quickly as they are hired, despite performing all of their expected duties. Here, Lorelai is (seemingly) her mother's opposite.

As noted previously, the series begins fifteen years after Lorelai leaves her parents' house; in apparent retaliation to her mother's mistreatment of maids, Lorelai becomes a maid at the ironically

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named Independence Inn. When the series begins, audiences are to understand that she worked her way up the employee ladder to become the Inn's manager. In her words, "I worked my way up. I run the place now. I built a life on my own with no help from anyone" ("Pilot").<sup>4</sup> The narrative's lapse in time conceals the type of labor involved in this process. In fact, audiences never actually see Lorelai labor as a maid. They do not see the struggle, challenges, or humiliations that normally characterize service work. To be sure, one deleted scene included as a DVD extra depicts a young Lorelai in a maid's outfit and toddler Rory in the Inn, although it is hardly the picture of labor: the girls are seen twirling and dancing in the Inn's empty entranceway ("Those Are Strings, Pinocchio"). Instead, Lorelai epitomizes the neoliberal entrepreneur whose independent hard work and determination are rewarded by upward mobility. It is a narrative familiar from a series like the *Cosby Show* that perpetuates a fantasy of upward mobility by highlighting an exceptional case in which structural barriers were overcome by a deserving protagonist (Jhally and Lewis 72-73).

In many ways, Lorelai's cultural displays of class membership, including her lifestyle and tastes, are also rooted in her resistance to that of her parents ("Lorelai's Graduation Day"). Whereas Emily's behavior is constrained by upper-class customs, in her chosen world Lorelai is free spirited and prone to vulgar, witty, and emotional outbursts that, by comparison, confer an authenticity onto Lorelai's character.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, she defends her escape from her parents' house as a means to safeguard her eclectic and outspoken personality: "I had nothing in that house. I had no life. I had no air. You [Emily] strangled me" ("Rory's Dance"). It is worth remembering that her parents' house was marked by all the privileges of upper-class wealth, including rarified educational opportunities, world travel, and endless commodities. Yet, like Emily's character, this lifestyle figures as unpleasant and undesirable, a source of suffering from which Lorelai has no choice but to escape, and she takes refuge in the comparatively more ordinary (lower-class) world of Stars Hollow. In this world, she is free to be her true down-to-earth self. For example, when Emily tries to make her family engage in dinner table discussion about "current events,

historical events and intellectual trivia” like the Kennedys, Lorelai’s retort marks her connection to the world of popular culture trivia, rather than a socially removed, presidential family: “Did you know that a butt model makes \$10,000 a day?” (“The Third Lorelai”).

Lorelai’s financial limitations also make her a likeable character, permitting her an authenticity that is denied to Emily. While Emily is always seen wearing stiff and symmetrical blazers and pant suits, Lorelai regularly displays her “thing for fringe,” sporting jeans, tassels, and rhinestones that further convey her character’s approachability (“I Can’t Get Started”). Lorelai is also resourceful, designing and sewing numerous outfits throughout the series; on two occasions, she repairs Emily’s clothing, who would presumably be dependent on her maids to complete such tasks (“Let the Games Begin”; “Wedding Bell Blues”). Lorelai eats meals served in vending machines, makes fun of George W. Bush, Jr. because “he’s stupid and his face is too tiny for his head,” and opts for VHS cassettes of movies recorded off television rather than DVDs with special effects because the former include “the original commercials, which is half the fun” (“Run Away, Little Boy”; “Christopher Returns”; “Always a Godmother, Never a God”). She is fun and cool, and her poverty is a source of pleasure for her and the audience. Rather than experiencing her independence from her parents as a painful loss of resources, she and the audience can relish her decision to be part of the real world in which (a distorted version of) poverty is represented as fun.

Other moments that point to Lorelai’s poverty are also performative in ways that undercut their seriousness, making them a source of comedic pleasure. A prime case in point is Lorelai and Rory’s relationship to food. Throughout the series, audiences see Lorelai and Rory preparing to consume an absurd amount of junk food<sup>6</sup>:

LORELAI: So, rocky road hot fudge sundaes and two cans of whipped cream to go with the movies? (“Lost and Found”)

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LORELAI: I'm getting pancakes with a side of pancakes.  
("Lost and Found")

CLAUDE: This is your second dinner?

RORY: Fourth, actually. ("A Deep-Fried Korean Thanksgiving")

RORY: Sausage wrapped in a pancake tied together with bacon. ("The Lorelais' First Day at Yale")

This display of excessive eating habits is a familiar marker of television's "white trash" stereotypes, normally a "particularly consequential transgression for women" in terms of their respectability (Bettie 141). Because *Gilmore Girls* portrays these eating habits with a light-hearted comedy, some critics have read them, instead, as a refreshing countercultural critique of commonplace on-screen depictions of women eating salads or nothing at all (e.g., Valenti). However, Lorelai and Rory's idealistically thin bodies challenge the legitimacy of this performance. They may be read instead as eating habits intended to superficially rebel against a world of wealthy delicatessens that also normalize overconsumption. They are the working class eating habits familiar from a series like *Roseanne* without the accompanying body sizes of Roseanne and her husband, Dan. In this way, viewers can enjoy as the women plan to feast on copious amounts of fast food without engaging the politics of food insecurity and waste or mainstream fat phobia especially "in the U.S., where weight is inversely correlated with socioeconomic status [and] fat, itself, becomes associated with 'lowbrow' status" (Bettie 138). The women and their viewers can have their cake and eat it too, so to speak.

In a related scene of total absurdity, Rory points to the presence of healthy food in their fridge as indication that her mother might be financially struggling: Rory compares the presence of cheese, vegetables, and bread in her mother's fridge to the fridge from her childhood with left-over pizza and cold fries, reading the former as indication that her mother may be trying to reduce her spending ("A Family Matter"). This exchange is, of course, counter to the reality of working class families who rely on fast-food restaurants

because they do not have access to the healthier options available in grocery stores (“Why Low-Income”). It is a distorted performance of a real kind of poverty. There is an indication that Lorelai is, in fact, reducing her expenses, but the means by which she tries to save money is part of the show’s inverted depiction of reality. Lorelai’s use of coupons is similarly performative. She relied on coupons at some point in her and her daughter’s life off screen, although they are treated on screen as though reliance on them is optional and not a matter of necessity for working class families (“The Festival of Living Art”).

### **Moments of the Real: Ruptures in the Fantasy**

Throughout its 153 episodes, *Gilmore Girls* features a few moments of the real, that is, moments when working class poverty becomes a source of humiliation and hindrance on the quality of its characters’ lives. In these moments, poverty is not displayed or chosen; it is imposed, although its systemic sources are concealed. The most obvious example is Lorelai’s inability to pay for Rory’s tuition to Chilton, a private secondary school, and Yale University. Although these moments are significant indicators of the benefits Rory reaps from her access to familial wealth (because her grandparents ultimately pay for her to have these opportunities), one moment is more to the point of poverty than high-priced educational opportunities.

The episode entitled “Secrets and Loans” begins with Lorelai rising pleasantly out of bed, putting on her robe, smiling as she sees her daughter, and retrieving her daily newspaper off the white front porch with a coffee mug in hand, all while Doris Day’s “Que Sera Sera (Whatever Will Be, Will Be)” plays in the background. It is a moment of idyllic, picture-perfect American middle-class life. Suddenly, the music stops as Lorelai’s foot sinks through the porch: Lorelai and Rory’s home--the physical epicentre of their family unit--has been infested with termites, the damage from which will cost \$15,000 to repair. In keeping with her generally fun disposition, Lorelai first approaches the repair cost with humor. However, this humor quickly fades, and Lorelai spends the rest of the episode trying desperately to find a bank that will lend her

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money for the repair. Despite flirtation, aggression, and begging, she is unable to secure the loan. Per the dominant neoliberal narrative of individualized success, Lorelai experiences her inability to get the loan as a personal failing, describing herself as “one of the biggest losers in Stars Hollow.” Rory and Sookie, Lorelai’s best friend, attempt to restore Lorelai’s sense of personal value by reminding Lorelai of her contributions to their community. Lorelai, however, is forced to accept that her community involvement is irrelevant to banks. Like the lyrics of Day’s song suggest, Lorelai is powerless over the structural forces that determine her credit-worthiness:

SOOKIE: You’re an upstanding citizen, you’re an active part of the community.

RORY: Yeah, you made all of the donkey outfits for the Christmas festival last year.

SOOKIE: You organized the Save the Historic Oak Tree campaign.

RORY: And you played Tevye in the, uh, Stars Hollow Community Theater production of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

LORELAI: Yes, well, five and a half stars from the *Stars Hollow Gazette*, unheard of ‘til that time.

SOOKIE: They [the bankers] should take that into account.

RORY: Yes, they should.

LORELAI: Yes, they should, but they won’t.

Here audiences see the economic limits of symbolic displays of class affiliation and neoliberal notions of personal achievement. If the show is accepted at face value, Lorelai performs as neoliberalism’s model middle-class citizen who independently supports her family and contributes to her community. Yet these are insufficient to grant her access to the economic capital needed to repair her home. This is a prime opportunity for the show to level a social critique against the class disparities with which it otherwise engages light heartedly. Instead, the episode depoliticizes what is, in fact, a structural problem (McCullough 246): it falls back on an interpersonal resolution, when Emily co-signs her daughter’s loan--an

option not necessarily available to all women. In other words, this crisis points to a systemic flaw in the neoliberal narrative of individual achievement and gaps in the image of an autonomous, individualized middle class, yet the narrative retreats quickly to a familial resolution that refocuses the issue on the personal dynamics between Lorelai and her mother. In Lisa Henderson's words, "A class standard gets articulated, but it doesn't get spoken." Indeed, when Lorelai and Emily leave the bank, their entire conversation centers around what Emily expects to receive in exchange for the co-signature, not the failure of a system that leaves Lorelai unable to repair her home without her parents' help or what might have happened to Lorelai if, like many women in her situation, she did not have access to her parents' wealth.

### Conclusion

A "best of both worlds" strategy characterizes Lorelai's performance as a classless protagonist who simultaneously typifies an economic middle-class fantasy and advantageously performs a working class cultural identity. Against the failings and shortcomings of her definitively upper-class mother, Lorelai performs the image of an anti-class hero whose eccentricities are beyond *classification*. In terms of cultural displays of class affiliation, Lorelai rejects her parents' lifestyle and codes of conduct and, in doing so, creates an impression of their class's undesirability. She is fun and authentic in contrast with her stiff and stifled mother. Economically, she performs the image of an independent, self-made neoliberal entrepreneur who can pick-and-choose from the market of symbolic identities available to her, as she autonomously constructs a life of her own choosing. She appears classless--beyond the restriction of any one class category and, as such, fulfils the empty image of the neoliberal middle class. When the harsh realities of economic inequalities momentarily interrupt this neoliberal fantasy--precisely the kinds of humiliation that a coherent working class could unite against--her recourse to her parents' wealth casts systemic issues through the lens of an interpersonal conflict, thereby "[disorganizing] the recognizable presence of wealth and

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poverty and effectively subvert[ing] the capacity for collective identity based on class interests” (Pascale 349).

If one accepts that television narratives articulate normative truths that enter into public discourse and reinforce or resist dominant ideologies (Stern 172), then *Gilmore Girls* is a prime indicator of and contributor to neoliberal notions of an autonomous individual made in the image of a classless middle-class American. Rossi is able to take pleasure in Lorelai’s mockery of upper-class social customs, celebrating the freedom she exhibits as evidence of an “anti-class hierarchy” and the alleged permeability of class boundaries (88-89). By analyzing this show in relation to the broader neoliberal logic out of which it developed, I argue instead that the show’s distorted depiction of upper- and lower-class lifestyles and associated pain and pleasure are instead cause for concern. At best, the series points to a lack of political commitment on the part of its producers, and at worst, it perpetuates a neoliberal fantasy that glosses over the harsh realities of working class life in ways that distract from the value of class consciousness. This seemingly class-based show exploits economic disparities in the articulation of a classless neoliberal middle class.

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### Notes

1. Erin Johns and Kristin Smith make a similar observation, citing class as one of the series’ “major propellants” (30).
2. This is not to suggest that a middle class cannot or does not exist; rather, that the majority of Americans who identify as middle class would be more accurately characterized as working class people who have achieved limited improvements in their standard of living, as Zweig suggests.

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3. In fact, one economist estimates that the real-life cost of Lorelai's home would be \$2.8 million (Adamczyk).
4. Stern offers a similar reading of the show's emphasis on Lorelai's *decision* to leave her parents' home, attributing it to "the postfeminist politics of individual decision-making separated from institutional constraints" as well as a denial of the community network on which Lorelai heavily relied for support (175-176).
5. Justin Rawlins makes a related argument, suggesting that the intertextual banter that characterizes the dialogue throughout *Stars Hollow* serves to distinguish the town from the senior Gilmore residence, because the former allows its inhabitants to "play with culture" (52). For Rawlins this narrative strategy has a democratizing function by opening the possibility that "cultural capital may be available to all," including the characters and their audiences (49). Instead, this article sketches the material limits of this free play.
- 6 To be sure, audiences very rarely see Lorelai or Rory actually consume the food that has been ordered (Mintz and Mintz 236).

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**Ahabs, Turtles, and Survivor Girls:  
Postmodernism in *Behind the Mask: The Rise of  
Leslie Vernon***

**Savanna Teague**

For those initiated into horror as a film genre, the sight is familiar: A young woman, fleeing for her life, runs through a foreboding copse of trees, searching for something, *anything* to use as a weapon against the mask-wearing, blade-wielding psychopath who pursues her. This description could apply to any host of slasher films; even novice horror viewers could name a few. Could the masked killer be Jason from the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* franchise, Michael Myers from the *Halloween* franchise, or even one of the many individuals who don the Ghostface mask in the *Scream* franchise? The answer for the purposes of this analysis, however, is none of the above. This supernatural/preternatural killing machine is Leslie Vernon, the titular focus of 2006's *Behind the Mask*, a mockumentary-style horror film that explores the very existence of horror as a cinematic genre. While watching *Behind the Mask*, the audience is confronted with the question of why people choose to watch horror films through a four-fold conversation that exists within the plot between Leslie Vernon and Taylor Gentry (the "Survivor Girl"), between the film and the audience (represented by the documentary crew's camera), between the film and the horror genre, and, last, between the film and scholars of horror. This approach culminates in an intricate metanarrative that, unlike other horror films that fall into the meta-cinema tradition, questions more than it mocks and entertains more than it references other films, providing a sense of genuine affection for the genre while asking questions of the audience that are less about guilting the viewers for taking pleasure in horror films and more about actually caring about the answers potentially provided. *Behind the Mask* takes the idea that "genre is . . . an object that is composed of a collection of films that are related to one another through their common possession of an

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essentially invariant narrative pattern,” and it acknowledges that narrative tradition, follows it, and yet, somehow, manages to produce something wholly different (Jancovich 11).

Although not a barren wasteland, the available scholarship focusing on postmodern elements within contemporary American horror as a genre is limited but, thankfully, growing. While films gunning for Oscar glory or those being touted through the film festival and art house circuits may receive academic treatises that give them a postmodern theoretical treatment, horror films have lagged slightly in this scholastic trend. However, horror’s relationship with gender, psychoanalysis, technology, audience tastes, and narrative structure make it the perfect playground for those wishing to dig their toes into that postmodern sandbox. *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* typifies this opportunity. The questioning aspect of *Behind the Mask* resists what Steven Best and Douglas Kellner describe, in “In Search of the Postmodern,” as “easy dismissal or facile incorporation into already established paradigms” (1). Horror films can easily be overlooked and/or dismissed by critics and academics alike because the genre is seen as embracing violence, gore, and misogyny and focused toward an audience that somehow manages to be desensitized to these elements while simultaneously reveling in them. However, this view produces a strict binary between “good” films (worthy of discourse) and “bad” films (into which category horror falls) that contradicts postmodernism’s opposition to such distinctions. As described by Isabel Cristina Pinedo in “Recreational Terror: Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film,” “the postmodern horror film transgresses the rules of the classically-oriented horror film, but it also retains the features of the latter, which form a backdrop against which violations of the rules are intelligible as such” (18-19). This audience awareness produces many metanarrative structures that can be seen in many contemporary horror films, such as the *Scream* franchise (1996-2011), *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011), and *Behind the Mask*.

In anticipating the paradigms of classical horror films along with the conceived expectations of audiences and critics alike, contemporary horror can break the rules while acknowledging to the

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audience that the filmmakers are aware that such rules exist. In *Scream* (1996), for example, the character of Randy Meeks stands in for those members of the audience who have already become familiar with horror tropes. By explaining the “rules” of horror, Meeks is establishing that the film (here defined as its writer, crew, and cast) is aware of audience expectations in order to later display that it can break convention or, rather, what is seen as convention by the viewing public. *Behind the Mask* takes this approach a step further by including fans, academics, and fan-academics in this conversation. The film begins with a documentary film crew, headed by the lone female protagonist, Taylor Gentry, who is working on the documentary as part of her thesis research, as she meets with Leslie Vernon, a self-proclaimed masked killer in the style of Jason Voorhees or Michael Myers as he prepares to select his victims—a stereotypical group of teenagers, later codified in *The Cabin in the Woods*, consisting of the popular/”slutty” girl, the virginal girl, the everyman, the jock, and a pair of stoners.

As Gentry and her crew follow Vernon as he makes decisions about how and when he will kill, the audience is presented with three modes of viewing scenes: the found footage scope, the reality scope, and the slasher scope. The found footage scope consists of the camera feed as the documentary crew films, complete with narration from Gentry. This element within the film draws immediate connections to many post-*Scream* American horror films, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1998) and *The Last Horror Movie* (2005), that relied on “found footage” as a gimmick (with part of the plot centering on the footage being discovered after some devastating event, such as the disappearance of a film crew). *Behind the Mask* predates the wave of found footage movies that followed in the years after its release (such as the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, 2007-2015) and yet still serves as a critique of those films. *Behind the Mask* never allows the footage to exist without some attachment to the universe within the film itself. The audience is never allowed to passively watch the documentary footage, which, consequently, is neither lost nor complete. Gentry and her crew must make moral decisions about whether or not to warn Vernon’s potential victims, choosing (until the end) to maintain (largely) a

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stance of objectivity/ noninterference for which actual documentarians are often criticized.

The secondary point of view is the slasher scope. Seen only during descriptions of events that Vernon dictates will take place or when he is actively killing, this mode of viewing depicts Vernon as a mindless killer. The framing of shots, complete with fog and seemingly directed within Vernon's mind, is reminiscent of innumerable slasher antagonists. The Dutch tilts (camera shots set at oblique angles) and low angles give the scenes a surreal quality while also making Vernon, who possesses a swimmer's build, appear bulky and imposing (more akin to a Kane Hodder-esque physique seen in many slasher movie remakes and revivals). Both the Dutch and low angles allow the creation of tension and danger by placing Vernon high in the frame, creating a sense of dominance. The slasher scope sequences are extremely brief and instantly derive a sense of unease from the audience. The personable tone that exists throughout the film suddenly vanishes with a brief moment of violence that jars viewers out of any comfort they might have felt being "in the company" of Vernon.

Finally, the most important and most frequent scope is that of reality. When the cameras come down, the perspective of the film centers on Gentry's point-of-view. She struggles with the moral implications of what she is doing and worries that she is encouraging a killer to murder innocent people. She can choose when filming will stop, even if Vernon will continue with or without her watching. Her questioning provides grounding for the reality of this universe and the way it functions: supernatural masked killers are real, but the moral obligations of an individual still exist alongside them. There are *rules*. Vernon has his own rules when choosing how and when he will kill, and Gentry has her morals as well as a conflicting desire to become a successful documentarian. Her perception of events and her decision to try to save the teenagers Vernon has targeted creates a shift in tone, and the light-heartedness of earlier in the film ends. Reality (specifically Gentry's reality) fully grounds the scene, and the camera never shifts back to Vernon's gaze. By Gentry choosing to engage, she recognizes that, in filming Vernon as he planned his murders, she had always been

participating in his plot, despite her claims of objectivity, and could never claim to have been an innocent bystander.

Gentry's conflict encompasses the importance of understanding the film's metanarrative. When an audience consumes media, they engage with that media. There is no "turning your brain off" when it comes to viewing a film; tropes and visual shorthand, whether positive or negative, are processed and interpreted immediately upon watching a film, commercial, television program, etc. Like the audience, Gentry is torn between how to perceive Vernon; with the mask, he is a monster, but, behind the mask, he is a likeable and gregarious goofball who keeps two pet turtles. However, Gentry is not a stand-in for all the audience members watching the film (the camera serves that purpose). She represents a very particular element of the horror fan-base; she is the female horror fan-academic. Gentry stands in for the Pinedos of the world, the ones who love horror but have to question it the more entrenched in academic discourse they become. Many horror fans have to confront the elements of the genre that are problematic--the perceived punishment of premarital sex, focus on the murder of women in various states of undress, and voyeuristic manner in which those murders linger for the audience to view--and that creates a conflict between enjoyment and awareness, i.e., knowing that something is problematic and feeling the need to reconcile that conflict between that knowing and enjoyment. For many scholars, like Pinedo, the resolution of the conflict comes when viewers recognize in confronting the negative aspects that they can continue to enjoy one's experience. For example, being able to recognize misogynistic tropes within horror films helps fans, filmmakers, and scholars alike in engaging in dialogue that might benefit the genre as a whole to discontinue the reliance on dated and potentially harmful clichés.

Gentry questions Vernon's actions in just such a way, and she experiences anger at what Vernon intends to do while also seeing his humanity and humor. This situation is similar to a viewer balking at the over-the-top violence in a film like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* but being able to have empathy with a character such as Leatherface, who interacts with the world with all the playfulness

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and selfishness of a rampaging toddler. In *Behind the Mask*, Gentry represents the academic, and Vernon is her text; her engagement with him creates the movie's central conflict and its emotional resonance with the audience. Like Pinedo in *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* and a scenario similar to that of *Candyman* (1992), Gentry feels the "tension between critical distance and passionate involvement in order to augment the power of [her] engagement with the genre" (5). Gentry is confronted with the misogynistic elements of what Vernon is doing, elements that he is keenly aware of and chooses to do anyway while being able to rationalize those elements into something that is positive for his female victim. He imagines his female target will receive empowerment from the experience he is forcing on her, which will, in turn, benefit her (despite the terror he is forcing this unwilling participant to endure). Vernon wants to be killed by his Survivor Girl, the female sole-survivor who will take on a masculine role and violently murder him so that he can return to life in an un-killable supernatural form. The Survivor Girl must be a virgin, and she must take up a phallic weapon of power to kill her pursuer, preferably his own weapon (in Vernon's case, a sickle). Although the film uses different terminology, this concept of a "Final Girl" is directly lifted from the research of another female horror academic, Carol J. Clover, and her influential book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (260).

Where pieces of Clover's Final Girl are present within the film, they are counterbalanced by shifts away from the trope. For most of the film, Gentry is unaware that she is Vernon's Survivor Girl because he has led her to believe that he has long-settled on a teenage girl. Unlike the trope as described by Clover, the audience's experience throughout the film does not shift between Vernon as killer to Gentry as survivor; for the majority of the movie's run time, Gentry is always present and active, even when the camera is focused on Vernon. They share the screen and the audience's attention. Gentry is always speaking with Vernon and trying to understand him, both for the purposes of her work and as a way to come to terms with her fascination. It is only during the majority of the slasher scope scenes that Gentry is not present; this holds

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true until the end of the film when she is the focus of Vernon's murderous intent.

Other instances of this trope inversion appear in naming conventions and the male gaze. Like many Final Girls, Gentry possesses a unisex name (other examples include Laurie from *Halloween* and Sidney from *Scream*). While typically the supernatural mass murderer has a more masculine name (Jason Voorhees, Michael Myers, Freddy Krueger, etc.), Leslie's name matches Taylor's in its usage as a unisex name, although it leans more towards feminine usage within the United States. As with his name, Leslie's gaze is not inherently masculine either. He does not "peep" on young women undressing; he watches and stalks without the element of the fetishistic scopophilia or sadistic voyeurism that is outlined by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (837-839). When Leslie looks, it is in targeting a means to an end, rather than seeing any real pleasure that he is taking from these acts when he is without his mask. This act as only a means to an end highlights the problematic nature of the Final Girl; her position as the surviving hero is dampened by the acknowledgement that she is merely a tool, in this scenario, for a male villain to achieve his goals, whether she is the target of rage (such as in the case with Michael Myers' against his sister Laurie Strode in the first *Halloween* film) or the method through which the killer achieves his infamy (such as with Vernon). Vernon's pleasure is derived from the pageantry and scene setting of creating his legend and from the opportunity to teach Gentry the motives and reasoning behind supernatural murder sprees to ensure her survival. His gaze is cold and calculated, making one reevaluate at once the male gaze within slasher films. Images of disrobing teenagers and stranded young women being "peeped" on from afar implies, at first glance (if one pardons the pun), to imply the overt sexual desires of the male killers (Buffalo Bill from *The Silence of the Lambs*). Although films that focus on human killers may reinforce this notion, the most popular and long-standing franchises featuring supernatural slashers do not. The gaze of the slasher does not typically give pleasure to the character himself, although it likely is meant to bring pleasure to members of the audience. Driven by a curse, Michael

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Myers weeps silently beneath his mask when he is driven to kill his young niece. With neither speech nor facial expressions, Jason Voorhees is a blank slate whose franchise began not with his voyeurism and punishment of sexual activity but with the gaze of his mother. Leatherface (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) finds child-like glee when he plays dress-up but less so when he is killing. It is a slasher like Freddy Krueger (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*), who does not don a mask, is the most obviously sexual, but he does not need to gaze. His presence invades the dreams and mind of his victims rather than watching from afar; he does not hide. In allowing Vernon to be seen by the audience with and without his mask, the film shows the audience a clear distinction between two types of slasher films: the masked and the unmasked killers. For the masked killers, any sadistic pleasure experienced by the audience has less to do with the killer's gender and more to do with the anonymity of the masked and silent gaze. The unmasked slashers, much more akin to those of the serial killer subgenre in how they behave rather than how they *look*, announce their pleasure to the audience (Freddy Krueger and Pinhead from *Hellraiser*) rather than the audience seeing that pleasure through their eyes; the audience has no point-of-view shots from these types of killers. Vernon becomes a mixture of both types of slasher, masked and unmasked; while he kills, the audience does not see through his eyes but, when he is unmasked, the audience learns of his pleasure in the staging of his murderous operation. The more voyeuristic shots within the film come from the documentary crew's camera. Although the camera operator is male, Gentry is the one directing the shots. Her professional and personal fascination with Vernon drives the more anonymous and silent gaze of the camera, and its focus is on a handsome young man rather than a vulnerable young woman.

If one were to take Clover's definition of a slasher from "Her Body, Himself" and examine it in comparison to *Behind the Mask*, a film made more than ten years after its publication, one can see a distinct launching point for the relationship between Vernon and Gentry. "[Slasher] films present us in startlingly direct terms with a world in which male and female are at desperate odds but in which, at the same time, masculinity and femininity are more states

of mind than body” (Clover, “Her Body, Himself” 68). Vernon and Gentry are not at desperate odds. They are neither lovers nor specifically friends; when Vernon turns against Gentry, her cameramen and fellow researchers are more emotional and upset about Vernon’s perceived betrayal. They try to reason with Vernon, trying to appeal to his better nature, to the person beneath the mask, with whom they had shared laughs and barbeque in the nights prior. Although Vernon does seem to pause in his assault for a brief moment, he nonetheless kills Gentry’s male companions, who stay behind to give her a chance to escape. While Clover contends that the “Final Girl is boyish . . . Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine,” she admits that the words *masculine* and *feminine* cannot “do justice to the sense of her character as a whole” (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 86, 106). The dynamic between Vernon and Gentry can fit in with this categorization with allowances for the limitations of wordage with which to speak about issues of identity and gender.

Naming conventions aside, the characters’ genders within *Behind the Mask* are a product of and a response to the horror genre and the public perception of it. Vernon wants a female sole-survivor because the trope of the Final Girl exists, not because he feels a sadistic urge to kill women. Gentry’s femaleness, while factoring into Vernon’s decision to kill her, is a part of who she is, and there is never a scene in which she shirks her femininity in order to kill and, therefore, never fulfilling the Final Girl trope to its entirety (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 102, 106). Gentry does not fit into the mold of “a physical female and a characterological androgyne: like her name, not masculine but either/or, or, both, ambiguous” (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 106). Rather than stabbing Vernon with his phallic weapon (as happens to Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger, and Michael Myers in various incarnations and sequels), Gentry crushes Vernon’s head within an apple press before setting him on fire. If one were to take this scenario to the pinnacle of potential metaphors, the presence of apples only seeks to heighten Gentry’s womanhood. As the apple is a symbol of fertility and original sin within Christian dogma, Gentry, a virgin, reclaims it in order to slay the force that seeks to destroy her.

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The pressing and squeezing of Vernon's head, face hidden by his mask, can be equated with birthing pains as Gentry unwittingly "gives birth" to Vernon, who survives being set on fire and rises from the grave with new supernatural powers. Even with these unforeseen negative consequences, Gentry never "acquits herself 'like a man'" (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 102).

Whereas Gentry's presence within the film presents a far more progressive portrait of the Final Girl in comparison to Clover's arguments, Tony Williams notes that the Final Girl typically is not victorious (167-168). Although she may survive the day, whether the Final Girl is mentally or physically capable of carrying on her life after the horror she has witnessed is up for debate. Alice barely makes it ten minutes into *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Part II* (1981) before being brutally killed. Nancy Thompson from *Nightmare on Elm Street*, one of the most pro-defense Final Girls, sacrifices herself to Freddy Krueger in order to save others in the third film, *Dream Warriors* (1987). Laurie Strode, possibly the longest surviving Final Girl, eventually meets death at the hands of her brother, Michael Myers, in *Halloween: Resurrection* (2002), the eighth installment in the franchise, released over two decades after the first film's release.<sup>1</sup> In pursuit of her goals of finishing her thesis, Gentry loses her friends, making her akin to Heather in *The Blair Witch Project*, and unknowingly makes it possible for Vernon to become the kind of killer that he wants to be, much like Alice does by killing Mrs. Voorhees in *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*.

Like Clover, Williams connects slasher films to a larger tradition of horror, arguing that most slashers owe some success in their filming techniques to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The character who would, by today's horror conventions, be considered the Final Girl is Marion Crane, and Norman Bates kills her halfway through the film. Lila, Marion's sister, steps in to fill the role of main female character, but Sam Loomis, Marion's boyfriend, ultimately confronts Bates to subdue him. This heroic male character is then revived in *Halloween's* Dr. Sam Loomis, the psychiatrist who monitors Michael Myers during his many years of institutionalization after the murder of his sister. Dr. Loomis fires the final shot of the first film to kill Myers and save Laurie Strode; however,

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when Myers does not die and pursues Strode further in the sequel, Loomis sacrifices himself to save Strode and to kill Myers by igniting oxygen tanks in a room when he and his former patient have a confrontation (Williams 169-170).

Although Strode disappears from the franchise, save for brief mentions, for twenty years, Loomis returns when Myers does, an archetype that Leslie Vernon dubs an “Ahab.” Referring to the obsessive whale-hunting sea captain of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, an Ahab is a force for good, whereas the masked killer is a force for evil, locked in a dance of life and death with neither being able to win. Vernon’s Ahab is Doc Halloran, his former psychiatrist, who dresses and speaks similarly to Donald Pleasence’s portrayal of Dr. Loomis.<sup>2</sup> Much as Dr. Loomis is a reference to *Psycho*, Doc Halloran is a reference to both *Halloween* and *The Shining* (the character Dick Hallorann, who possesses the gift of the Shining and tries to warn the Torrences of the dangers of the Overlook Hotel). While being a nod to the audience who might recognize the similarities between Dr. Loomis and Doc Halloran, the pre-establishment of this trope of a wizened older man who comes to the defense of a younger, more vulnerable person allows Vernon to explain to Gentry why his “work” as a supernatural killer is important--there has to be a balance between good and evil; Vernon has to exist for Doc Halloran to counteract that with goodness. Unlike Laurie Strode, Gentry’s survival is not because of Doc Halloran, it is because of Vernon. He explains to her the tropes and tricks he will use. This is part of his plan; he never wants to kill her as he needs her to survive. This makes Gentry a bit of a conundrum as a Final Girl. As she is predetermined to live and was in minimal danger, can she be considered a Final Girl? While Williams might note that the more progressive distinction of Final Girl may not apply due to the main decision-making being done by a male character, Gentry chooses her own weapon when she fights back when Vernon antagonizes her into attacking him, fully aware of what he wants her to do, and refuses to allow him to have his perfect plan.

This scene, in many ways, is in direct conversation with the audience; unlike many post-9/11 horror films, the characters of *Behind the Mask* are all likeable, including Vernon. The audience

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feels conflict in choosing a side and realizes a level of manipulation on the part of the filmmakers. While this anonymous hand of the author/filmmaker is always present, it is thus made all too present. The audience wants Gentry to survive but does not want Vernon to die, and the viewers are given just such an ending that manages to be both poignant and satisfying. Vernon rises from an autopsy table after being defeated (seen from a found footage/security camera point-of-view shot), the question of where he will go and whom he will kill remains unanswered. If he follows Jason's example, he will kill Gentry if a sequel is made; if he follows Michael Myers' or Freddy Krueger's pattern, he will wait for some sequels before finally offing her. However, Gentry may prove to be more like other post-*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* heroines like Sidney from *Scream* or Julie James from *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and its sequel, who both have, thus far, survived their franchises for better or worse. Williams argues that "Although eighties heroines may appear more masculinized than their predecessors, the conservative ideological dimensions of this gender change needs throughout investigation before we may safely regard it as progressive" (170). The heroines of the 1990s and early 2000s, like Buffy, Sidney, Julie, and Taylor, embrace femininity in the face of terror without relying on any wilting flower trope, although men may temporarily step in to aid them; their choices are the ones that ultimately matter. The best possible outcome for Gentry would be one similar to Nancy Thompson, who meets death in a third film only to be resurrected in Wes Craven's 1994 foray into meta-narratives, *New Nightmare*. In the film, Heather Langenkamp, who played Thompson in the original *Nightmare*, plays herself and must take on the role of Nancy "one last time" (or so Craven, who also plays himself in the film, beckons with sage-like wisdom) in order to defeat Freddy Krueger for good (until *Freddy vs. Jason* that is). In doing so, Thompson, through Langenkamp, is triumphant, even though she and her son have been through a hellish trauma. With a *Behind the Mask* sequel supposedly in the works, only time will tell what will become of Gentry.

The conversations happening in *Behind the Mask* reflect academic and fan discourse as well as fan and genre expectations.

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Critical detachment is not entirely possible when one cares about one's subject matter. In confronting this dilemma of academic/professional integrity and the pleasure one finds as a fan, *Behind the Mask* breaks down the dichotomy between fan discourse and academic discourse, allowing them to merge. In that the film also blends humor with references and trope acknowledgement within its own genre, it took the changes in horror brought the 1990s and continued to examine them, to question them but to do so with loving reverence. It reflects the "new playfulness" that early on pitted postmodernism against modernist aesthetics (Best and Kellner 11). Vernon makes his decisions because the conventions exist within the horror genre; he does not act with independent thought once his demeanor shifts to that of the slasher killer. His actions, whether the viewer is horrified or is laughing with him, invites reflection on the tropes he feels compelled to follow and those that both he and Gentry invert. Rather than treating horror as completely irreverent or devoid of value, *Behind the Mask* engages with its audience, academics, and its characters to develop a metanarrative that is both critical and fruitful for study, avoiding the pitfalls of the purely parodying horror comedies that arose in the early 2000s. The film asks its audience and scholars to be critical of what they are consuming, just as one should question a meal served to them by Hannibal Lector: Just because it tastes delicious does not mean that the dish is necessarily good for the consumer (or for the consumed). One can enjoy horror and recognize that there are still problematic elements that need to be addressed and that these films can be improved upon without the reliance on tropes that do nothing but stagnate the genre as a whole. Taylor Gentry represents that idea perfectly, although it is important to remember the lingering bit of doubt about how successful her efforts at confrontation were. By the film's end, she is left worn down but victorious, and Vernon receives what he had always wanted--to rise again. The moral of this supernatural slasher tale is that engagement with media never dies, and, in true sequel fodder fashion, the work of the Final Girl is yet to be done.

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### Notes

1. Since Laurie's death was neither seen on screen nor confirmed otherwise, I believe that she, like her brother had done so many times before, escapes death and miraculously survives her fall (broken by the many sturdy and secure branches of the pine trees) from the top of the Grace Anderson Sanatorium. Perhaps she is currently living her life somewhere outside of Terre Haute.
2. For an extra level of irony, Robert Englund, who starred as Freddy Krueger in all *Nightmare on Elm Street* films until they were rebooted in 2010, plays Doc Halloran.

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Ford Frick's *Big Leaguer*:  
A Commissioner Takes a Swing at Baseball Fiction

John Carvalho and John Lofflin

Baseball commissioners come from a variety of backgrounds: law (Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, the first commissioner), politics (Albert “Happy” Chandler, former senator and governor of Kentucky), the military (William Eckert, retired Air Force lieutenant general), and academia (A. Bartlett Giamatti, president of Yale), for example. However, the background of Ford Frick, who served as commissioner from 1951 to 1965, is unique: He came to baseball administration from the sports page and the airwaves. Frick was a baseball reporter for the New York *American* and *Journal* from 1921 to 1933, mainly covering the Yankees. He also did a daily sports commentary show on WOR, a New York radio station (Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People* 109).

Originally, Frick joined the National League in early 1934 to serve as director of the league’s Service Bureau, which conducted its public relations efforts (“Tributes Paid Walt Johnson and Carl Hubbell” 8). Before the year was out, however, Frick had been elevated to the League presidency after his predecessor, John Heydler, was forced to resign, citing health issues (Drebinger 29). Frick would serve in that capacity until 1951, when he was named commissioner of baseball.

Although he was part of baseball’s top leadership for more than thirty years, he remained close to his original vocation and the sports journalists he left behind. Frick wrote season previews annually for the Associated Press (Frick, “Frick Sees 5 Clubs in Race for Flag” 57; Frick, “Baseball Outlook Pleases Frick” S5) and made sure that his former colleagues controlled the selection process for the Baseball Hall of Fame (Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People* 203). They remained among his closest confidantes and strongest supporters during his time in baseball leadership—although, as the veteran sports writers who were his friends retired, they were replaced

by a younger, more skeptical generation, so that support decreased as his tenure continued.

Frick's love for the written word apparently extended beyond the newspaper sports page. He also enjoyed poetry and good fiction, as would be expected from a former high school English teacher. He did write sports-themed poems, although not as prolifically, or as successfully, as Grantland Rice. The love of fiction apparently manifested itself in a way that has not been widely known until recently.

Unlike most individuals of his stature, Frick did not leave extensive archives. He did, however, leave various papers and memorabilia with family members that included not only official documents and personal correspondence but also creative writing projects. Within these varied collections, two chapters have emerged that appear to represent a baseball fiction project that was never published and probably never completed. Frick's authorship can be inferred, although not independently or officially confirmed; no firm date can be set for when the chapters were written. Assuming Frick wrote it, the good condition of the manuscript (on the newsprint copy paper used in the days before computers) points to a later authorship after Frick retired in 1965, as opposed to a spare time project during his tenures as National League president or Major League Baseball commissioner.

Regardless, when a former baseball commissioner seeks to produce a work of baseball fiction, it opens a unique window into his mind. The project was titled *Big Leaguer* and was described as a fictional autobiography of a major league baseball player. A close look at the manuscript can give a rare personal insight into Frick's attitude on the sport to which he devoted his life. Although unedited and incomplete, it also deserves study as an example of baseball fiction--particularly by someone who, early in his career, was a contemporary of many famous baseball fiction authors. Before

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examining the work, however, it is instructive to review Frick's early career in writing.

### Ford Frick, Journalist

According to a family history, Frick's first experience with newspapers involved not writing for them but selling them as a boy growing up in rural Indiana. Even right out of high school, he was preparing for a journalism career. Before enrolling at DePauw University, he spent a year at the International Business College in Fort Wayne, taking classes in typing and stenography and working as an office boy and police reporter for the Fort Wayne *Gazette* (Holtzman 199). At DePauw, he paid his way through college working several jobs, including serving as a correspondent for newspapers in Indianapolis and Terre Haute, along with the Chicago *Tribune* (Daniel 5).

After college, he moved to Colorado so he could serve both passions: He taught English at a local high school and played semi-pro baseball over the summer (Kelley 30). Eventually, he left teaching and returned to newspaper work, writing for the Colorado Springs *Gazette*. While at the *Gazette*, Frick experienced the break that would carry him from Colorado Springs to the center of Jazz Age sports journalism, New York City.

On June 3, 1921, heavy rains caused flood surges in the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek to converge at Pueblo, Colorado, setting off a catastrophic flood (Follansbee and Jones 769-774; Macy 201-211). On the next day, Frick flew over the devastation and provided a vivid first perspective on the flood's destruction (Frick, "Telegraph Reporter Sees Death and Ruin" 1). According to Frick, a printer in Colorado sent his report to Arthur Brisbane, managing editor of William Randolph Hearst's New York *American*. Brisbane was impressed enough that he hired Frick and brought him to New York City (Kelley 30).

As a journalist, Frick was not considered the literary equal of the era's wordsmiths--names like Grantland Rice, Damon Runyon, Ring Lardner, and W.O. McGeehan. He did, however, gain a reputation for hard work and reliability. As a lifelong writer and former

English teacher, he appreciated his colleagues' writing, both in newspapers and books.

That reputation for diligence also served him well when he began to work with Babe Ruth as one of his ghostwriters (Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People* 35; Walsh 25). It was a different era for sports journalism--a time when writers enjoyed a closer working relationship with the athletes they covered. Traveling with Ruth and his Yankee teammates--and working in the epicenter of Jazz Age sports--Frick found an inexhaustible lode of gems for his future writing projects.

He retained his proximity to baseball and its players when he began his career with the National League in early 1934. In his seventeen years as League president, among other challenges, he helped to steer the League through integration in 1947. In 1951, the League's owners elected him commissioner of baseball.

Frick would lead major league baseball for fourteen years, through some of its most turbulent times: expansion to the West Coast, the seeds of a powerful labor movement, the continued effects of integration, and the expansion of sports broadcasting to television. These disruptive social forces might have proved disconcerting for Frick, whose life and career consisted of New York City baseball, an owner-controlled labor market, segregated leagues, and newspaper or radio thrilling the fans.

For all of those changes, still, the issue with which Frick was most identified involved his decision to not recognize Roger Maris's home run record, because Maris had needed 162 games to break it, eight more than the previous record holder, Babe Ruth ("Ruth's Record" 20). The decision would be criticized in the years that followed, not the least because of Frick's conflict of interest as Ruth's former ghostwriter.

Such controversies caused Frick to look forward to his eventual retirement as commissioner. As he did, he confessed to also anticipating an opportunity to return to the pursuit he had left more than three decades before to enter baseball administration, composing "just for the fun of writing" (Durso S2). Thus, after Frick retired, he did so not only as one of baseball's leaders for more

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than three decades but also as a writer who had the time to devote to the pastime that had been his profession.

Unfortunately for Frick, however, whether intentionally or by distraction, he did not produce much in the way of writing. His productivity was limited to his memoirs, *Games, Asterisks, and People: Memoirs of a Lucky Fan*, which was published in 1973, eight years after he retired. Soon after the book was published, he suffered a series of strokes that limited his writing, and he died in April 1978.

Thus, all he left was the unfinished projects that included the two chapters of *Big Leaguer*. Nevertheless, *Big Leaguer* is valuable. It can provide insight into how his experiences would be reflected in his writing and intriguing to see which of those experiences he chose to write about, what picture he wanted to paint of the game, and how he chose to construct his novel in the context of other baseball novels of his era.

## Ford Frick, Novelist

The first significant decision a novelist must make is who will tell the story. It determines the voice of the novel and the lens through which the story will be seen. It controls how readers will construct the story for themselves. As a lens, the narrator's vision can be so wide it seems omniscient, or it can be narrowed to only the perspective of the teller. If the teller has limited vision, what readers can see will also be limited.

This limitation creates difficulty for novelists who write about baseball. If the baseball player they choose to tell the story is undereducated, self-centered, and aware of only the quality of his swing or the health of his arm--as so many of the characters in baseball novels are--the perceptions he can relate to readers are limited. Just as a character cannot use vocabulary he does not have, the narrator cannot relate what he does not notice.

Most baseball novelists have chosen some metafictional variation to solve the problem (Limon 164). These choices establish the distance a reader may feel from the action of the story. Will the reader be lost in the action, or will the reader be reminded that

someone else is providing the detail? Will that someone else actually become part of the story, the story within the story?

Frick answered some of these questions at the top of *Big Leaguer* with the byline "As Told to Ford C. Frick." He chose to distance the reader from the story by providing himself as its conduit. The "as told to" vehicle goes back at least as far as Daniel Defoe, who claimed to be only Moll Flanders' editor for style and, more importantly, taste.

Defoe and the commissioner may have used "as told to" narration to solve a mutual problem. Defoe needed some personal distance from Moll, and Moll needed some distance from her gentle readers. "The pen employed in finishing her story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak language fit to be read" (Defoe 2). In the same way, perhaps, Frick needed distance from his ballplayer. Frick apparently intended a gritty inside tale and may have wanted, however futilely, to separate himself from the ballplayer and his language. Frick included several impolitic notions in this novel fragment as he attempted to paint professional ballplayers "in the stark nudity of their real being":

Baseball is no game for weaklings. It demands fighters, not diplomats. I've known hundreds of big league ball players in my day, old and young, weak and strong, good and bad. I've known men who would lie, steal, gamble, dissipate. I've known crooks who didn't even know what honesty meant. But I have yet to meet a big league ball player who was a physical coward – one who wouldn't fight at the drop of a hat to protect a teammate, to win a ball game, or to wipe out a fancied insult. Call it nerve, call it courage, call it old-fashioned "guts" as you will--the fact remains that they all have it. (Frick, *Big Leaguer* II-11)

In choosing a narrator other than the ballplayer to tell the story, Frick was also closely following the tradition of baseball novels during the last century. Ballplayers were rarely chosen to narrate a story, and when they were chosen, the writer found a creative way around their literary shortcomings. Bernard Malamud took the

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challenge in *The Natural*, but the narrators of Heywood Broun's *The Sun Field*, Eliot Asinof's *Man on Spikes*, Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh Prop.*, W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*, and Eric Rolfe Greenberg's *The Celebrant* were not ball-players. They were other characters in the stories whose language and perceptions were broader.

Frick's "as told to" narration in *Big Leaguer* is similar to vehicles used by two novelists, Ring Lardner and Mark Harris. Lardner had already earned Frick's respect and admiration when Frick arrived in New York in January 1923 to begin his career there. He particularly was a fan of Lardner's "You Know Me Al" letters (Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People* 83), a series of columns that formed the basis for Lardner's novel with the same title. *You Know Me, Al* is composed entirely of letters from rookie pitcher Jack Keefe to his buddy back home. From those letters alone, readers construct a picture of Keefe. It is not a pretty picture. The letters reveal Keefe as a self-centered blowhard who sees the world through the distorted lens of his inflated ego and provincial naivety.

In his memoirs, Frick praised Lardner's columns and his novel for its "picture of the human side of athletes--their hopes and ambitions, their likes and dislikes, their virtues and their shortcomings" (Frick, *Games, Asterisks, and People* 83). When Frick approached the typewriter to craft his own novel, it is clear from the first pages that his ballplayers would register the shortcomings of both violence and revenge.

Harris, who wrote three baseball novels in the 1950s, used a technique even closer to Frick's. In *The Southpaw*, which is where Harris' series of baseball novels begins, Harris makes the rookie pitcher, Henry Wiggen, the author of the book. In subsequent novels, the other players are even aware Henry is writing about them, so they nickname him "Author." The technique Harris employs solves the ballplayer-as-narrator problem while adding another dimension to the story. Henry Wiggen is not a consummate writer or speller, in the tradition of Jack Keefe, but Harris has him writing as Henry *supposes* a writer *should* write. Henry uses no contractions, for example, and his language has that stilted, convoluted feel familiar to many college writing professors. In a sense,

the Henry Wiggen novels are also about the nature of the writer's craft, a "how-not-to-write" subtext.

At the outset of *The Southpan*, Henry is haggling with his fiancée and his father about how much obscenity should be included in the book. His father wins the argument, suggesting he leave out the "filthiest and the vulgarest" words to "protect the women and the children" (Harris 8). Although no vulgar or filthy words appear in *Big Leaguer*, the language of Ford Frick's ballplayer, though grammatically correct in translation, is suitably raw.

Whether baseball novelists choose metafictional techniques by design or literary necessity is not clear, particularly in the case of *Big Leaguer*, because a fragment can only hint at Frick's intentions. From a biographical perspective, the "as told to" choice is equally intriguing. It was probably either ironic or naïve. It was naïve if he thought he could hide behind it--if he thought the views and the language of his unnamed ballplayer could be disguised as not the former commissioner's views. He was also naïve if he thought using the "as told to" technique would not remind critics that he served as ghostwriter for Babe Ruth (Carvalho and Ankney 66), which they would no doubt exploit as another occasion to comment on the asterisk next to Roger Maris' name. On the other hand, perhaps Frick's aim was irony as a way to thumb his nose at the critics. Given his obsession as a columnist with praising everything Ruthian (Carvalho and Ankney 84), it remains surprising Ruth is mentioned only once in this embryonic novel, unlike the frequent role Ruth plays in so many other baseball fictions.

### Lessons in Courage

Even without Ruth, the novel Frick began had much in common with the canon of baseball novels published during his century. *Big Leaguer* shares key similarities with *The Sun Field*, written by another sportswriter Frick knew, Heywood Broun. Like most other baseball novels, *Big Leaguer* and *The Sun Field* deal with questions of courage and manhood. *The Sun Field* seems to pivot on these questions.

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Broun's narrator is an occasional sports writer named George Wallace. He has introduced the woman, with whom he is in unrequited love, to both baseball and a ballplayer, Tiny Tyler, drawn in the likeness of Babe Ruth. Wallace is literate--solving the narration problem--well educated, even a poet. He describes himself as an inch shorter than Mayflower descendant Judith Winthrop, pudgy, and unable to blow smoke rings as perfectly as she. Set just after World War I, the same time frame as *Big Leaguer*, Wallace tells the reader that Judith staffed wartime canteens and Tiny returned to baseball from the "bloody mire" of Flanders Field, but the narrator's own weak heart kept him from battle.

The pivotal moment occurs outside the ballpark in New York. George and Judith are waiting for Tiny to shower and dress. They are approached by a trio of young toughs taken by Judith's looks. One of the men puts his hand on Judith's arm, and she gives him a slap across the face. He grabs her wrist. However, George reacts with words, not punches; he does not, in Frick's terms, "fight at the drop of a hat." In this situation, George tells readers that words did not work. He winds up punched in the stomach, lying on the sidewalk.

The next moment in the narrative is a wrenching lesson from Broun in the meaning of courage, at least as it is defined in the baseball novel. To read it is to shudder for George:

And right here comes the most shameful part of my whole performance in the business. I've never told anybody before. Even Judith won't know until she reads this. I didn't bounce right up again and fight. . . . Probably I said to myself, "A policeman will be right along." (Broun 57)

Of course, Tiny comes along, lights into the tormentors, and clears the sidewalk. George is never a rival suitor for Judith again.

Frick's ballplayers suffer no similar lack of fight. He dwells long on a scene in which a wily veteran cuts the rookie pitcher's foot to the bone with his spikes and the rookie, three years later, responds

in kind. This seems to be part of Frick's message about manhood and courage (Frick, *Big Leaguer*, I 3-4).

Frick's ballplayer draws a picture of hard scrabble childhood where courage meant willingness to fight daily, urged on by fathers who would give losers a second "whipping" (Frick, *Big Leaguer* first draft 8). He tells readers his task is to provide an authentic picture of baseball; then he immediately launches into a detailed description of a fist fight on his first day in the big leagues, capped by a comment that he "never failed to come out of a fight without a renewed respect for the man who was my opponent" (Frick, *Big Leaguer* II 16-17). This idea of courage as willingness to fight is also translated in *Big Leaguer* as courage or self-sacrifice for the game; Frick lauds a pitcher who finished five innings despite a telegram telling him his wife had been injured in an automobile accident and might not live (Frick, *Big Leaguer* II-2).

### War Casts a Shadow

Developing his concept of courage, Frick directly addressed those who accused ballplayers of avoiding the World War I:

A lot of unkind things have been said about professional baseball players. Many of them are true. You're bound to find all types and sorts of men among the five or six hundred youngsters who each year go to make up the big league rosters. Cheats? Yes. Profligates, and liars, and ingrates? Certainly! These you will find in baseball as you find them among lawyers or doctors or bankers or any other profession. But cowards, never. Baseball and physical cowardice are not compatible, nor ever will be. (Frick, *Big Leaguer* II 11)

Frick's reference to World War I echoes a path other baseball novelists have followed. Most baseball novelists, as John Limon points out (160), have referenced a preceding war, often obliquely, substituting the battlefield for the ball field, following the concept by Deanne Westbrook (110), who sees "sublimated and displaced aggression at the center of our civilized national game."

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Limon's argument, although it is more complex than Westbrook's, seems to focus on American novelists' compulsion to write about war. Nearly every era is, unfortunately, marked by one, yet war is extremely difficult to capture in words. Thus, they tend to substitute other fields for battlefields and, using Westbrook's terminology, the baseball field is one of those options. Limon points to the mysterious fifteen years Malamud took from Roy Hobbs' life as spanning the era of World War II. He sees "undue violence" in the novel as Malamud's attempt to capture war against the backdrop of an essentially pacifist game (Limon 157). "The novel does not mention war," Limon writes, "but war is the subject of its allegory" (Limon 160).

Limon's analysis provides a possible window into *Big Leaguer*. This novel fragment also contains undue violence. Frick vows, through his narrator, to present professional baseball as it really is, and, apparently, he does not see it as a pacifist sport. However, he may also be using this canvas to contrast the violence of the two great wars he has witnessed, in addition to the Korean War and, depending on when he wrote *Big Leaguer*, the beginning of the Vietnam War.

War seems to weigh heavily on Frick's mind; this brief fragment contains a major episode directly referencing World War I. This is probably natural, given the machinations of baseball owners in 1917 and 1918 to maintain business as usual and the subsequent outcry from the New York *Times* and other critics (Seymour 248-55). In one overwrought passage, Frick describes a childhood enemy, a boy he used to call "Tony Bananas," who later became a big league teammate. Tony is dying young from a loose piece of shrapnel in his lung left over from World War I. Frick focuses the death scene on the Distinguished Service Cross his friend was awarded:

Less than a year ago I stood by his bedside there in the old street, and held his hand while he bid goodbye to the world and went on the last long journey. I'll never forget it. He lay there wasted, and wan and broken, but he smiled when I came into the room, and clutched my hand. He nodded toward an old fielder's glove that was

lying on the table. He was too weak to point. His sister Nita brought it over.

"You take it" he whispered. "Keep it to remember Tony. Goodbye--old pal."

I never cried much--but there were tears in my eyes then--tears that I'm proud of. They buried Tony with a D.S.C. on his breast. . . . [s]omehow I had a hunch that Tony cared more for that old fielders [sic] glove than for all the D.S.C.'s in the world. Only a Wop--but he was a man. And baseball helped make him. (Frick, *Big Leaguer* first draft 9)

That Frick would devote so much space to this story indicates its importance to him. He may have simply had a good story to tell. However, he may also have wanted to strike back at those who criticized baseball for continuing to play during World War One and players who did not volunteer for duty. As commissioner, Frick experienced similar criticism of a professional ballplayer first hand when Mickey Mantle failed three draft exams in 1951 and 1952 during the Korean War. He may also have dwelled on the "Tony Bananas" story to bolster the often used notion of baseball as a key to integrating immigrants into American culture. Finally, as the last line indicates, he may have used this story as a parable to credit baseball with making a "man" of his fictional friend and to define manhood in terms of courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice.

Frick's personal history may also be at work in this episode. In 1918 he served as a supervisor of training for the Rehabilitation Division of the War Department (Carvalho 31). If Limon's analysis holds, he may have been writing about baseball as a way to comment on war; here the latent shrapnel that killed "Tony Bananas" after the war could stand in for the latent psychological damage he may have witnessed in the rehabilitation hospitals in 1918.

### **Scandal, Corruption, and Players as "Mere Chattel"**

Frick joins the other baseball novelists in exploring--against the mythical backdrop of the purity of the game itself--scandal, cheating, corruption, and the unsavory business practices of the

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professional game. This seems a surprise coming from a writer who occupied baseball's highest office and charged with protecting the integrity of the sport while, in service to team owners, ushering in a new era of revenue with expansion west and the advent of television. If money corrupted baseball, Frick had a hand in making it available.

Hardly an important baseball novel exists without noticing how money and greed corrupt the game. Jack Keefe is obsessed with money; Tiny Tyler falls prey to handlers and promoters; Roy Hobbs takes a bribe, repents, and still strikes out; Henry Wiggen falls to the temptation of the spitball; Mike Kutner's wife in *Man on Spikes* offers her body to the owner's son in an effort to gain a big league promotion for her husband. The 1919 Black Sox appear in Kinsella's cornfield, and Ray Kinsella's ball diamond occupies the last section of land necessary for corporate farmers to unleash robot combines. However, the shame of corruption reaches Biblical proportion in *The Celebrant*.

Eric Rolfe Greenberg's narrator is the fictional Jackie Kapp, a gifted jewelry designer who becomes friends with Christy Mathewson, a character drawn from the brilliant real-life Mathewson who pitched for the New York Giants from 1900 to 1916 and later managed the Cincinnati Reds. He designs rings for Mathewson's World Series champion Giants, their beauty to celebrate Mathewson's beauty on the rubber. As the novel concludes, Kapp's family and family business have been corrupted by greed and gambling, just as the baseball game he loves is about to be disgraced by the Black Sox scandal of 1919. Mathewson has resigned as manager of the Cincinnati club, enraged by his own players' cheating. He has enlisted to fight in World War I and been exposed to mustard gas. In Greenberg's fictional account, he is near death, sitting in the press box diagramming suspicious plays in the 1919 World Series for a sports writer who would later lead the Black Sox investigation. After the concluding game, coughing uncontrollably, bloody handkerchief in hand, Greenberg has him addressing Jackie in a hotel room with this New Testament injunction:

With a mark I damn them. I damn Cicotte. I damn Jackson. I damn Risberg and Gandil and Williams. And if

there be others I will damn them as well, I will root them out and damn them for eternity . . . I will allow them their full portion of loss, and when the corrupters are counting their gains I shall spring upon them and drive them from the temple! (Greenberg 262)

Frick is not as religiously inspired as Greenberg, but he is, in several paragraphs, writing at the same fever pitch. Frick, writing from the player's point of view rather than through the eyes of Greenberg's celebrant-fan, goes beyond corruption to an indictment of ways the economic structure of the professional game is tainted by money, one-sided contracts, and the "devious, tortuous" path to a career:

If the average young fellow knew what a baseball career really means, he would sign a contract less enthusiastically. But he doesn't.

Like the theater, baseball is a spectacle. The man on the outside sees only the finished product. He can't go behind the scenes to view the raw material as it is assembled and drilled into presentable production. He can't know the disappointments and the heartaches; the disillusionments and the struggles that are a part of baseball's life backstage. Which, perhaps, is just as well. (Frick, *Big Leaguer*, I 1)

When he presents the heartbreak players experience as nothing more than "raw material" backstage, Frick is unexpectedly hard on the business of baseball and baseball owners in *Big Leaguer*. In a different passage, his ballplayer laments signing his first professional contract. As a former baseball commissioner, Frick could be expected to apply a lighter touch to the industry's business practices. Instead, his ballplayer remembers his signing day ruefully: "In my mind's eye, I saw the cheering throngs, heard the thunders of applause and pictured myself as a star in the big leagues. I didn't know the other side; didn't realize when I signed my name to that paper I was signing away years of my life; turning myself into a

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mere chattel to be traded hither and yon as my owner wished” (Frick, *Big Leaguer*, second draft I 9).

Eliot Asinof spent 276 pages of *Man on Spikes* telling the story of a ballplayer who signed away not only his future but also his wife’s future. Such criticism seems more natural in a novel that contains, in later editions, a foreword by labor leader Marvin Miller. Asinof’s ballplayer, Mike Kutner, signs a contract to play professional baseball that might as well be a prison sentence. Despite the value of his play, he is relegated to the minor leagues his entire career, unable to either break through or bring himself to quit his soul-killing quest. Even his wife tries to help him escape, driven by her desire to start a family and see her husband free of contractual bondage. As Mike Kutner shines in a minor league game, the owner’s son should be scouting, Laura Kutner finds herself in a hotel room with the wealthy scion. Her thoughts are heartbreaking:

“Oh what’s the use? What’s the difference? The man’s been screwing Mike for years. Your sweet, wonderful Mike. She cringed. And now he wants to screw you. Maybe this is the way it has to be . . . maybe.” (Asinof 237)

Frick could be describing Mike and Laura Kutner when he pushed even deeper into the point. “A baseball contract is a one-sided thing,” he wrote. The pity, his ballplayer lamented, is that kids sign baseball contracts blinded by the glamour of the game, then “awaken to facts later--but then it’s too late” (Frick, *Big Leaguer*, second draft I 19). For an author who was known to defend both baseball’s owners and its labor system (particularly the reserve clause) as commissioner, it is another unexpected passage.

Frick makes much of a real college football scandal in *Big Leaguer*. In the first draft of chapter one, he mentions Bruce Caldwell, who was expelled from the football team at Yale in 1927 with two games left in the season after a local newspaper discovered he had played a few minutes in two games at Brown University before transferring to Yale (Cicitto). Frick later crossed through this reference in pencil, but nearly half of the rewritten first chapter is spent placing his ballplayer in a similar position as a college baseball player caught playing semi-pro games for peanuts. Frick even doubles

down on scandal; his ballplayer accepted money from a booster just to enroll in college.

The real Bruce Caldwell had a brief, well-published, baseball career--good bat, no glove--at about the same time Frick was writing about sports and moving into baseball administration, so he certainly would have been aware of the Caldwell story. It is odd that Frick would occupy so much of the revised manuscript utilizing the Caldwell backstory for the hero of his novel (Frick, *Big Leaguer*, second draft 1 8-17). His fictional treatment of the Caldwell story is much seamier than the real event, which was actually just a minor oversight regarding what was basically a gentleman's agreement among Ivy League schools. Perhaps with so many baseball novels recalling the 1919 Black Sox scandal and with the problems he confronted as commissioner, while at work on a novel that would picture professional baseball in unflattering terms, this was a way of saying the college game was not so pure, either.

### Conclusion

*Big Leaguer* is a rare treasure. Created by a baseball commissioner whose early life was marked by literary aspirations but whose thirteen years of retirement were marked by only one published book. Readers can greet its discovery with a mixture of fascination at what it represents and relief that it did not get away, as so many other artifacts of Frick's life have.

*Big Leaguer* exhibits many elements common to baseball novels, but it does not break new ground beyond its unique authorship. In *Man on Spikes*, Asinof exposes the desperate dog-eat-dog nature of the professional game. *The Celebrant* and *The Natural* focus on defacement of the game by cheats and gamblers. *You Know Me, Al* and *The Sun Field* confront the inevitable battle between youth and age. All of the major novels are, in some fashion, shaped by the wars preceding them. Although Frick could have set his novel in any time frame, he chose the period directly after World War One and expended much energy on a touchstone story about a fellow player dying from a latent war injury. Similar to other writers, Frick uses baseball as an opportunity to explore issues of violence, courage, and manhood. It remained to unwritten chapters for Frick to

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develop his vision of the hero and the heroic although his book seemed to be heading there.

What belongs to Frick in this private moment between a baseball man and his typewriter was a strong desire to describe the game as he knew it--spikes like knives, players like chattel--and the players as he knew them -- angry, jealous, talented, driven men grinding out an existence day by summer day. He seemed to be reacting against the way other novelists sought beauty in the game instead focusing on its grit.

Broun, in *The Sun Field*, focuses his novel by telescoping a single moment when Tiny Tyler snatched a line drive from the air, "as a God might pick a comet . . . . No sculptor ever achieved anything like that arm and shoulder of his when he reached out for the ball" (Broun 23). Frick would have none of that soft focus. Even in the writing of baseball fiction, Frick deferred to the journalistic style that marked his early career. The game and its characters, filtered through his memories and recorded on newsprint in his typewriter, told the story well enough on their own. Unlike other baseball novelists, he showed no desire to pretty up the game or the men who played it with prose or poetry.

The spare, simple style could not mask the complicated nature of Frick's relationship with baseball. *Big Leaguer* is indeed a love letter from Frick to the game to which he gave more than thirty years of his life. As with any long-term marriage, the relationship was obviously complicated. The simple game of Frick's youth had given way to the sad reality of major league baseball--a reality Frick could not ignore. Even as the sports writers--as opposed to novelists--of his era kept much of the unpleasant side of baseball hidden from fans, Frick seemed challenged to expose it in *Big Leaguer*. Thus, his first two chapters detail the off-field complications of professional baseball more than the simple, glorious on-the-field competition he cherished. Whether he saw this as virtue or vice is difficult to tell from the novel he began.

No one can know where Frick, as author, would have taken his story. Given his genial nature, it is hard to believe that it would turn out to be a gritty, cynical expose of a beloved game. More

than likely, given these first two chapters, the main character, like Frick, would have experienced criticism and struggle but ultimately would have upheld baseball as retaining the idyllic nature that attracted both author and main character as young boys.

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**The Mobile Phone as Agent and Evidence, Crime and Punishment:  
A Study in the Murder Case of State of Florida vs. White**

**Lynn Koller**

Research shows the mobile phone causes or exacerbates a wide range of emotions in intimate relationships, including jealousy and insecurity (Dunn and McLean; Halpern, Katz, and Carril; Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais; Stern and Grounds), which are driving forces of violent crimes. Phones clearly provide a medium to express conflict, but as the devices become more enmeshed into every aspect of life as physical objects and modes of memory and communication, they are becoming third parties in intimate relationships, with the ability to create conflict as well as help resolve it. Interestingly, despite the fact that people touch their phones an average of 221 times a day, for 3 hours and 16 minutes out of 24 hours (MacNaught), and carry them close to the body day and night, they may be only dimly aware how much data they generate. It may be stored on the devices and distant servers, potentially sold to third-parties, viewed by government entities, and coveted by hackers. This data might be used in a myriad of unimaginable ways during the course of a lifetime--or in the prosecution of a crime.

Mobile phones played a significant role in the Seminole County, Florida, murder of Sarah Yvonne Rucker, mother of four, and the jury's finding of guilt for Dwayne White, her estranged husband, who was convicted of the crime and sentenced to death.<sup>1</sup> Public records reveal that both White's and Rucker's phones influenced the parties' actions immediately preceding the murder and also provided compelling evidence of White's guilt in the ensuing jury trial in 2014. If White's death sentence is carried out, it could be said that the phones catalyzed the deaths of both the victim and murderer. Personal technologies always have unintended consequences that come with the ostensible benefits to the user, but the ubiquity of mobile phones, along with the rapidity of their

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adoption, make our relationship with this technology particularly crucial to understand.

Most mobile phone users are not murderers, but the technology has changed how people communicate with intimate partners and is affecting how they feel about themselves and their partners. Examining the circumstances of this capital murder case highlights some ways that mobile phone technology influences feelings in interpersonal relationships and cultural values in a larger context, how loss of control of the physical devices has had an impact on the sense of well-being, and the ways in which phones transparently collect evidence of the minutia of everyone's movements and moods.

Whether White would have brutally murdered his estranged wife if not for the symbolic and physical role of the mobile phone cannot be definitively answered; however, to consider how the technology influenced both parties' actions leads to an understanding of the ever-increasing tendency to anthropomorphize mobile technologies and produces considerations for future research.

### **The Facts of the Case**

On August 29, 2011, just after 5:00 a.m., 42-year-old Sarah Yvonne Rucker was found dead, naked from the waist down, in a parking lot with multiple stab wounds to her neck, including a severed windpipe and carotid artery. Hours later, Seminole County Sheriff's deputies arrested 41-year-old Dwayne White for her murder.

White had gone to Rucker's house unannounced around 2:00 a.m. on the night of the murder, first speaking to their teenage son, Dwayne, Jr., who remained at the house that evening. The elder White had a criminal record of violence, including five felony convictions prior to this crime. Rucker left the house, fearing White would hurt her. She called 911 three times that night, and all calls were played in the subsequent jury trial. The first two calls were short. In the second call, from her driveway, she spoke for a few seconds before White saw her on the phone. The arrest warrant states that she could be heard saying "Stop! I am calling the police"

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before being disconnected. After finding out that she called emergency services, White became violent, threw a beer bottle, and pushed Rucker to the ground. During that altercation, White confiscated Rucker's mobile phone, which she required as an operating room technician, and left (State of Florida v. White). Rucker was on-call that evening for her job at the hospital.

In the final call to 911 hours before White killed her, Rucker used her son's phone and had an extensive conversation with the operator as officers were being dispatched to her house. She said that White was "'jealous, irrational and crazy' for taking her phone previously and contacting other men with whom she had been communicating." Later, during questioning by the police, White admitted reading Rucker's phone history that night and calling a number belonging to a male, "perhaps a boyfriend," but getting no answer. White had a history of aggressively depriving Rucker of her phone. Court records show that months prior, in February 2011, White had a similar violent encounter with Rucker, which also ended with him taking her phone, house keys, and car after an altercation.

In the early morning hours of the murder, in a desperate effort to regain her phone, Rucker agreed to meet White at a sandwich shop parking lot about twenty miles away, despite his threats and her fear of his violent tendencies. (According to the arrest warrant, in an earlier call on February 11, 2011, after police responded, Rucker advised an officer: "I am as good as dead.") She took her son's phone with her to meet White. Two passersby found her lying in a pool of blood that morning. She was pronounced dead at 5:48 a.m. by emergency workers. Rucker's phone was never recovered, although it still provided critical evidence in the case via the data stored and collected by the phone service provider.

Police found bloody palm prints, which an expert witness at trial attributed to the defendant, on the sandwich shop window near her body. White testified at trial that he went to meet Rucker at the sandwich shop, found her body, knelt, and placed his hand on the windowsill, leaving the bloody prints. The palm prints were strong evidence, but White's appellate attorney, John Selden, Assistant Public Defender for the 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, believes that the jury

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found data records showing the mobile phones of both parties pinging towers along the way to and from the murder site some of the most compelling pieces of evidence of guilt. In the record of evidence, the phones took on lives of their own, described anthropomorphically in the appellant's brief (*White v. State of Florida*), which outlines expert testimony based on phone records:

[The investigator] testified that Appellant's phone left the area of the marital residence in DeBarry [sic] at 2:01 A.M., on the date in question, traveled the route including I-4 West to the downtown Orlando area pinging several towers along the way, and then pinged a tower near the Branson Street address of his girlfriend's residence in Orlando at 2:47 A.M. During that same time frame, the records showed that the victim's phone, now in Appellant's possession, also left the Deltona area at approximately 1:59 A.M., traveled the same route, and was pinged at the area of Branson Street at 2:37 A.M.

According to the testimony, Dwayne Jr.'s phone, which was then in the possession of the victim, pinged the tower nearest the marital residence in DeBarry [sic] at 2:01 A.M., and again at 3:22 A.M. (representing the time the victim was on the longer call to 911 and while giving the police report). Thereafter, from 3:30 A.M. onward, records demonstrated that the phone traveled likewise westbound on I-4, past the areas of State Road 436 and State Road 417, and then from 3:46 to 3:52 A.M., the phone was pinging off of the tower closest to the Miami Subs location in Longwood.

Finally, the records showed that Appellant's phone was on the move during that same time, having left the tower near his girlfriend's house at 3:33 A.M. and pinging the tower covering the Miami Subs at 3:42 A.M. As well, the phone records indicated that Appellant's phone received a call at 3:32 A.M. from Dwight Jr.'s phone (used by the victim), which lasted nine minutes in duration. Another ping for Appellant's phone was noted at 3:52 A.M., at the

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same tower covering the Miami Subs, and the next ping was not until 7:02 A.M., back at the tower covering his girlfriend's residence. [*citations omitted*]

The three mobile phones are described in the court record as if they were moving of their own volition: "Appellant's phone left the area," "the victim's phone . . . also left the Deltona area," "Dwayne Jr.'s phone . . . pinged the tower," "the phone traveled likewise westbound," etc. The phraseology gives the impression that the phones are at least marginally sentient entities with the will to move purposefully from one place to another. There is no mention in this excerpt about how the phones moved or who moved them. As such, it makes sense that the evidence itself was a record of the phones' movements that imply the movement of the people in possession of the phones.

While being interrogated about his role in his wife's death, White, who consistently denied responsibility, told detectives that they should go through Rucker's phone for her texts and calls to other men, to "cover all your bases" (White v. State of Florida 22). When asked who he thought killed his wife, he suggested to detectives that Rucker's phone would incriminate the actual murderer. Ironically, White was correct, because data the phone generated was used to convict him. However, White instead was referring to several hostile texts he had seen on her phone with other parties: "I think once you, you know, get in her phone—you will find the answer to that" (22). Whether White committed the murder or not, his assertion that the phone has the answer if investigators can "get in" it is consistent with his behavior when previously searching Rucker's phones for evidence of her connection with others.

In this case, if White murdered Rucker and discarded the phone, the phone would hold the answer, and he would be aware that investigators would likely never find it. If he did not murder Rucker and had seen hostile texts with other men, he is making a reasonable assumption that the phone may hold the answer—if only investigators could find it.

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White was charged with first-degree murder, and he was convicted by a jury on October 23, 2014. He testified on his own behalf, denying that he killed his wife. Nonetheless, the jury voted 8-4 to recommend the death penalty due to the heinous, atrocious, and cruel nature of the crime. The judge sentenced him to death by lethal injection. White is only the second person in five years to receive a death sentence in Florida. His case is currently on appeal before the Florida Supreme Court.

The word *phone* appears 56 times in the defendant's appellate brief, which includes a summary of the facts and evidence. As such, analyzing White's behavior in this case alone offers insight into the power of the phone to drive behavior.

### Mobile Phones on Fixed Bodies

According to Pew Research, 92% of American adults own a mobile phone (Rainie and Zickuhr 10), including 64% who own a smartphone. Mobile phones are distinguished from smartphones in that a mobile phone might only be able to make and receive phone calls and texts, compared with having sophisticated communication functionality. A smartphone has a more advanced operating system, can access web services and social media, and has location-tracking capabilities. Though the court record does not indicate the type of phones used, all of White's and Rucker's phones appear to be smartphones, based on how they were used. In this case, the terms *mobile phone* and *smartphone* are used interchangeably. The smartphone capabilities are crucial to the influence of the device, as is the mobility function. Both of these elements are relatively new developments in the history of the phone, with mobility becoming mainstream in the early 1990s and smartphones exploding in popularity in 2007 with the advent of the iPhone.

Certainly, White was violent long before mobile phones became an integral part of his or his victim's life. The couple had been together since around 1991 and legally married since 2006; they had four children. In 2006, he was charged with domestic battery and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and he had criminal charges before and after that. With regard to the events leading up to the murder, however, the victim's phone seems a pivotal player

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in the drama. Control is key to White's abuse of Rucker. Holding a device that is a storehouse of information about the phone owner's life, as well as that person's key to access to help by others, is a powerful motivator to possess a victim's phone for someone driven by control.

White's violence toward Rucker could be characterized as *intimate terrorism*, "defined by the attempt to dominate one's partner and to exert general control over the relationship, domination that is manifested in the use of a wide range of power and control tactics, including violence." This term contrasts with *situational couple violence*, defined as acts of violence in a relationship that are not part of a general pattern, such as escalation of an argument to the point of violence (Johnson and Leone 323-324). Court records and testimony indicate continual abuse and that Rucker feared he would kill her. With the exception of controlling a partner's physical body, there is hardly a more intimate object than a person's mobile phone, evidenced by White's determination to possess it and Rucker's desperation to hold on to it. While other personal technologies, such as computers, may contain personal data, nothing compares to the mobile phone's record of personal communications and contacts. It holds a special significance and power reflected in how closely its users keep it to their physical bodies.

Decades ago, Marshall McLuhan proposed that "electric circuitry" was becoming an extension of the central nervous system. McLuhan's aphorism that the medium is the message, as well as that technology is becoming an extension of the human body, is becoming literally true as the phone becomes a physical appendage that extends intellectual and physical functions in a tangible way. Our love for these devices and pain in their absence, the way that we fondle the keys and spread images apart with our fingers, the way that we speak into the devices seeking answers and connection with others--these devices seem to have become a part of our physical being. They house a record of intimate connections with others, giving anyone who possesses them access to what used to be private memories, as well as professional and personal connections.

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In this case, the trove of information on Rucker's phone seemed to inflame White's already violent tendencies. The phone contained a tangible record of her connections to others, including men, and her intimate contact with them. White stated during police interrogation and testified in court that he read Rucker's call logs and text threads during the time he possessed her phone prior to the murder (White v. State of Florida 22, 26). In fact, the evidence demonstrates that he received some satisfaction in possessing the phone and that he left her without it more than once.

The rise of wearable technologies, such as Apple Watch and Fitbit, increases the likelihood that the technologies may become less distinguishable from physical bodies and even identities. These technologies generally all have some ostensible practical use, but the overall effect of a growing affection and haptic relationship seems to lead to what Jonathan Franzen describes as a replacement of "the natural world that's indifferent to our wishes--a world of hurricanes and hardships and breakable hearts, a world of resistance--with a world so responsive to our wishes as to be, effectively, a mere extension of self." White's control of her phone deprived Rucker of that world by taking the device that connected her to others, allowed her to work, and gave her access to emergency aid, and it provided him with access to her intimate connections. White's understanding of how depriving Rucker of her phone would cause her apprehension may stem from his own relationship and dependence on technology or from his observations of her reaction. Either way, he seemed to understand, at least intuitively, that possessing her phone was holding onto an extension of his wife, the person.

White's actions illustrate that, as a twist on McLuhan's ideas, not only does the phone become an extension of self, but it becomes an extension of other people as well, as the objects of desire. There is a material correlative of the phone that houses the texts, images, and links to others that constitutes what seems like the whole person. The phone, it seems, virtually *becomes* the other person. There is an intimacy with the phone, the physical object. In some ways, the other person is a simulacrum of the intimacy of the digital texts and images that he or she transmits, especially

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when one considers that people and courts are retaining the data and imagery from mobile phones in the face of the accused defending themselves.

As previously cited, studies reveal that social media, increasingly accessible on smartphones, can incite jealousy in intimate relationships. It is possible that the high levels of information about a partner contribute to this effect. Wall postings, check-ins from locations, photos, the acquisition of “Friends,” and comments by others can offer a great deal of detail about how people spend their days. Further, the research also shows Facebook increases the likelihood of contact with ex-partners. The more active someone is on Facebook, the more likely he or she is to feel jealousy and monitor a partner’s Facebook activity. Facebook users are more likely to connect or reconnect with other Facebook users, including previous partners, which may lead to emotional and physical cheating (Clayton, Nagurney, and Smith). Anecdotally, White’s appellate attorney, John Selden, recently defended a case where the defendant was accused of second-degree murder in a conflict that began from jealousy and anger over a Facebook post. In that case, the defendant was convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter (State of Florida v. Peterson).

In the White case, there is no specific court evidence related to social media; however, the technological factors that cause the unsettling feelings for social media users, such as messaging threads, phone call logs, and contacts, were available for White to see on Rucker’s phone. He could readily see contact information for anyone Rucker had texted, the time when she had last communicated, all photos she had taken, and written content produced between Rucker and anyone else. Hypothetically, White could have clicked on a contact, and if that contact were connected to social media, he could have found a great deal of information about that individual, including a photo. Rucker did not have the opportunity to erase, delete, or alter the information on her phone, but given the extent of her actions and behavior surrounding the loss of the device, it would seem unlikely that she would have found that a viable option. The power of the phone lies not in the physical shell, but rather, in the bits and bytes that it holds.

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To deprive Rucker of her phone not only gave White control, but it seemed to instill panic in her. This response is not surprising, given how significantly the phone has an impact on a typical user. A Gallup poll showed that 52% of U.S. smartphone owners check their phones “a few times an hour or more” and that most Americans have their smartphones by them day and night (Newport). The data shows that 81% of these smartphone users keep their phone near them “almost all the time during waking hours.” The survey found that the majority of smartphone owners perceive their smartphone contact as below average, noting that would be mathematically impossible. Researchers interpret the findings:

It’s possible that Americans either misperceive what others are doing, or that they feel it is a socially undesirable behavior and therefore want to believe that they aren’t doing it as much as others. The data show that even among owners who say they check their phone every few minutes, only one-third believe this is above-average behavior, and about half claim that their minute-by-minute monitoring of their smartphone is about the same as others they know. This could reflect the fact that these highly frequent phone checkers are surrounded by family or colleagues who are similar to themselves and engaging in the same type of behavior. (Newport)

The users’ misperceptions about how often they use their smartphones may also result from the devices’ growing transparency caused by their ubiquity. With users having such a close relationship to these devices, it seems a wonder that criminals do not recognize the power they hold to cement evidence of their crimes. Certainly there are simply stupid criminals; however, the extent that phone data is used in court demonstrates something else at work. White certainly did not contemplate the iconic nature of the mobile phone as he charged down I-4 wielding a knife, pinging towers and call logs all along the way, with his wife’s phone pinging towers at his girlfriend’s residence, all the while generating data verifying his movement to the murder site. Yet, by contrast, the evidence shows that he was aware of how much information it held about the object of his rage and how to access that information. If White

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had understood the power of the technology less, in its ability to control Rucker, she may be alive today.

The news is full of examples of criminal activity and evidence captured on the perpetrators' phones. This seems to demonstrate a pathological compulsion to maintain connection with the device, in the most precarious and self-incriminating circumstances. Searching news stories for criminal actions where phone records are used as evidence brings up hundreds of current cases. The most recent notorious example is Omar Mateen, who texted his wife and searched Facebook for publicity of his crime-in-progress in the midst of the horrendous massacre at Orlando's Pulse nightclub in 2016, sometimes demanding victims hand over their phones. News reports indicate many victims clung to their phones, some sending heartbreaking texts and calls to family pleading for help. The 2013 Vanderbilt gang rape case is another recent example; Brandon Vandenburg used his phone to record video of the unconscious victim being raped by him and three friends and then sent the video to others. Brock Turner, the Stanford student convicted for sexually assaulting an unconscious woman, has a trove of images and texts on his phone that are evidence of illegal activities as well as his deception in his criminal court case. It is relatively difficult to find a current violent case where information technologies do *not* play some role.

In White's case and many others, his phone records showed his whereabouts continually as he carried his phone to and from multiple crime scenes. Of course, there was a record of all of his texts and calls to Rucker that evening. It would be difficult to conceive that White was unaware of the basic technological capabilities of his phone, given the circumstances. He participated in a pre-mediated act that required time to facilitate. At any point in time, he could have mitigated the possibility of evidence by discarding or destroying the phone that he carried, but he did not. There are many instances where people have lost their lives trying to retrieve or save their phones and certainly many where phone users risk the lives of others for the sake of using a phone (e.g., texting while driving). This is a new phenomenon that does not seem to have a corollary in the history of technology. White may

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have felt, consciously or not, that he *needed* to hold onto his phone at all costs, knowing it was tracking his location and had a record of all calls to and from the victim all prior to Rucker's murder.

Interestingly, White did vociferously claim to the police that Rucker's phone would somehow vindicate him by answering the question of who killed his wife; however, that phone was never found. Rucker's work phone, taken by White that evening, last pinged a tower at 2:37 a.m. near White's girlfriend's house, miles away from Rucker's residence (State of Florida v. White 15-16).

A recent opinion piece in the *New York Times* describes the myth of the savvy consumer as an informed person who "fluidly navigates the waters of everyday consumption" with the idea that smart devices, like phones, improve the quality of life (Silverman). The author notes that the smartphone was revolutionary and its success was not replicated by other smart devices; even the word *smart* has become a euphemism for surveillance. Users are conditioned to think that they must continually feed the devices data to help them learn and anticipate the users' needs. Silverman states

Essential to this myth is the notion that influence and power work transparently. Experience shows that this isn't the case, yet we continue to flatter ourselves by adorning our bodies, homes and cities with smart gadgetry and claiming that it serves us. Perhaps the real smarts on display here are those of the tech-industry mandarins who convinced us that we needed all this stuff in the first place.

Society can hardly be sad that White did not recognize the power of the devices he carried to ultimately convict him of a horrendous crime. The evidence shows he believed that by controlling his victim's phone, he had some power over her, and he remained oblivious to the ability of his own device to have that same power over *him* in the hands of others. The cause of that obliviousness could be that the phone has become so integrated with the physical and emotional sense of self that it feels like a part of the body. For White to believe that he could protect himself during a murderous

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rage by dumping his mobile phone would be akin to him believing he should cut off the hand that stabbed Rucker.

## **Conclusion**

Personal technologies affect our values. We can surmise practical reasons that Rucker and White valued their phones, but the story seems to indicate a larger shift in cultural values reflecting the mobile phone as an extension of the physical body and personal identity. The phone has elements that literally identify it with its owner, such as the phone number, apps, and object identifiers, but its link to identity now runs far deeper.

There have always been crimes of passion, but there is something about the phone that can make people crazy. In this case, it essentially led to both parties' deaths: the information on her phone drove White's anger and need for control, and Rucker wanted her phone back so badly that she presumably agreed to meet White in a parking lot to retrieve it, even though she had told multiple parties he was going to kill her. All the while, White's phone, and that of his victim, were tracking his whereabouts and recording her calls to 911, later providing the evidence that would lead to his death sentence.

The question remains whether White would have committed the crime in the absence of mobile phone technology, which cannot be known. The phone played a significant role in this drama, as it also has in past dramas. It is possible that White's stealing of Rucker's phone saved her from more violence previously, in that White was satisfied with knowing that his possession of her phone would suffice for that moment. However, it is hard to conceive that the events of August 29, 2011, would have occurred as they did without the participation of both parties' mobile phones. It is more certain that a jury may have viewed the evidence in *State of Florida versus White* in a different light without the clear, convincing pings and data from the devices pointing digital fingers at the defendant.

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### Notes

1. White appealed the verdict and death sentence. The verdict was upheld, but his death sentence was vacated by the Florida Supreme Court on March 31, 2017. Due to a change in Florida case law that requires a unanimous vote for death, he will be resentenced.

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**The Inconvenient Ancestor:  
Slavery and Selective Remembrance on Genealogy  
Television**

**Matthew Elliott**

In more than ten years of genealogy television programming, no revelation about a celebrity's ancestry has captured the media's attention quite like that of Ben Affleck's third great-grandfather, Benjamin Cole. Ironically, Cole became famous for being forgotten, as he was omitted from Affleck's segment on *Finding Your Roots* ("Roots of Freedom") after Affleck, as he later explained on Facebook, "lobbied" executive producer and host Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to remove the story because he was "embarrassed" "to include a guy who owned slaves" in a televised version of his family history. When the story of this very personal effort to evade slavery and ancestral slaveholding became public as a consequence of the Sony email leaks in spring 2015, it initiated a month-long media frenzy. The controversy also illuminated the increasing presence of genealogy in popular culture and the shaping influence it has begun to have on popular history and identity.

In the press, Affleck was lambasted as "dumb" (Cohen) and "wrong" (Smith) for seeking to hide this revelation of ancestral slaveholding. Yet, some also defended him, such as Dean Obeidallah, who asked "Who would not want to cover that up?" Still others, such as Ty Burr in *The Boston Globe*, suggested that the topic itself may be unworthy of public discussion, a "non-story" for anyone who does not "care about celebrities or how any of us come to terms with inconvenient family histories." Even as the controversy quickly faded, doing little long-term damage to the players involved or to the popularity of the show, the effort to suppress a genealogical story about slavery clearly struck a cultural nerve, and the divergent responses reveal a lack of consensus on the subject. How do we come to terms with our "inconvenient" ancestors, especially slaveholding ancestors? Furthermore, what role

does genealogy television now play in shaping the public discourse around slavery, particularly through its use of selective remembering? With a focus on *Finding Your Roots*, in particular, including the leaked but never aired original version of the Ben Affleck episode, this essay addresses these questions and strives to shed some light on how genealogy television is shaping the way slaveholding ancestors are both remembered as well as conveniently evaded in contemporary American culture.

Just as Burr called Affleck's ancestry a "non-story," scholars have long dismissed genealogy as an unworthy subject for cultural or academic analysis. As recently as 2013, historian Francois Weil could reasonably proclaim that genealogy was "arguably the element of contemporary American culture about which we know the least" (2). However, the past several years have seen a significant increase in critical attention to the subject, as scholars from across the disciplines have begun to examine the cultural significance of this increasingly popular pastime. Despite genealogy's history as a form of status-seeking for the aspiring elite, since the *Roots* era of the late 1970s, genealogy has been propelled by the individual pursuit of "self-understanding" (Weil 203) and efforts at "self-making" (Kramer, "Kinship" 380; Nelson 76). As a cultural practice, genealogy thus exists at an intersection of history and identity, as individuals look to discover unknown information from their family histories as a way of shaping their contemporary identities. Genealogy is indeed a "way of writing history" (Saar 232; Bishop 394), but its historical narratives are highly personalized and intended to shape the way subjects see themselves and are "counted by others" (Saar 236).

While the search for self-understanding has been at the core of genealogy for decades, more recent developments in data and DNA technologies have transformed both the practice and the perception of genealogy, leading not only to its extraordinary growth in popularity but also to the increased interest in the subject among scholars. Those genealogists of earlier eras who toiled away in the dusty archives surely never could have imagined the genealogy of today, one that intersects with big data, DNA science, big business, and even entertainment and celebrity culture. Prominent scholars

now reference the “contemporary obsession with ancestry” (Wald 263) and describe “origin seeking” as “something of a national pastime” (Nelson 5).

Not only is genealogy reported to be among the most popular search terms on the internet, but popular culture is saturated with origin stories and genealogical data (Zerubavel 4). Advertisements for web-based ancestry companies pervade mass media with promises that “your story is waiting to be discovered” (Ancestry.com) in their online archives, and even traditional news sources such as the nightly news or the major daily newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* increasingly cover genealogy-based stories like Barack Obama’s ancestral connection to Dick Cheney or Michele Obama’s slave ancestry, as well as the more politically-charged “birther” debates and the more recent political attacks and counter-attacks focused alternatively on Elizabeth Warren’s and even Donald Trump’s ancestry claims.

Still, the most visible platform for personal origin stories remains genealogy-based television shows. Now an established television genre that broadcasts on five continents, genealogy television commenced in 2004 with the original BBC version of *Who Do You Think You Are?* The popularity of the British show established the widely-used celebrity interview format and spawned numerous spin-offs, including the U.S. version, broadcast originally by NBC (2010-2012) and later TLC (2013-2016). Even before *Who Do You Think You Are?* arrived in the U.S., PBS staked out a market for a more academic approach to genealogy television, with scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., using genealogy-focused interviews with celebrities and other public figures as the hook for documentary-style narratives about broader themes and neglected segments of U.S. history in *African American Lives* (2006, 2008), *Faces of America* (2010), and *Finding Your Roots* (2012, 2014, 2016), among others. Taken together, these various franchises have provided more than twelve seasons and well over a hundred celebrity-genealogy segments in just over ten years.

With frequent commercial and corporate tie-ins that promote the business of genealogy, these shows do more than just model or even shape contemporary genealogy. Rather, such prominent

genealogical narratives have far-reaching effects in a contemporary cultural context where “normative views” of identity, kinship, and ancestry are being re-imagined (Wailoo, Nelson, and Lee 8), such as in the increased focus on DNA as the source of individual characteristics. As historian Matthew Frye Jacobsen notes, genealogy may involve a “politics of identity” for the individual, but when millions become involved as participants and observers, it also becomes about “the politics of heritage for the nation at large” (6).

Yet, even as the contexts and cultural stakes of genealogy have clearly changed in recent years, the fundamental process of constructing a family tree remains largely the same as it has always been. One of the central elements of this process is what sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls “selective remembrance” (10). Such acts of selective remembrance are inevitable when faced with the sheer number of possible paths one may take into the maze of any ancestry. Because everyone’s biological ancestors double each generation heading backwards into the past, roots-seekers face many choices, whether conscious or not, about where to focus their genealogical research. For example, most U.S.-born individuals inherit their surname from their father, and many seek information about that ancestral line due to this shared name. However, only three generations back, the focus on one’s surname-sharing great-grandfather comes at the exclusion of seven alternative great-grandparents who share the same biological distance to the subject, regardless of their different surnames. Going another five generations back, that surname-based ancestral line still represents a single individual, a sixth great-grandfather, but at this stage, that single ancestor is one out of 256, representing less than half of one percent of one’s direct ancestry from that generation alone.

Furthermore, when information about any researched ancestor is discovered, one again faces many implicit if not explicit choices about the information uncovered and whether it will be noted, remembered, or possibly even incorporated into one’s sense of self. In this way, newly discovered ancestors come to be acknowledged or disavowed, perhaps even “forgotten or disowned,” as Anne Marie Kramer writes (“Kinship” 392, 382). Genealogy, therefore, is more than just the “passive documenting of who our ancestors

were” (Zerubavel 10). Rather, it is the active construction of who they were and who they are now to their present-day ancestors. As Zerubavel states, genealogists never just discover ancestors; rather, they construct narratives that enable “[us] to actually make them our ancestors” (10).

In genealogy television, these traditionally private acts of ancestral remembrance and forgetting are put on display and dramatized for maximum audience interest. Not only are ancestors selected by the shows for their story’s potential emotional power, but they are presented to the subjects on screen without forewarning in order to prompt authentic emotional responses, whether excitement, anger, or sadness, all of which frequently result from these ancestral “big reveals,” as such scenes have come to be known in reality television. In the case of celebrities like Ben Affleck, the tension and the stakes of these scenes are further heightened because the subjects have well-known and carefully crafted public images to maintain. Thus, when a celebrity appears to have his or her sense of self shaken by the introduction of unknown ancestral information, an experience that Nelson calls “genealogical disorientation” (84), audiences experience the added thrill of witnessing unscripted emotion and being introduced to a version of the celebrity’s personal identity that differs from the typical public image. In fact, Kramer’s study of audience responses concludes that audiences are most receptive to just such a display of “authenticity” from celebrities on the show. Thus, it is not the genealogical data itself but the celebrity’s reaction to it that, according to the study, accounts for the success or failure of an episode (Kramer, “Mediatizing Memory” 438).

For the most part, genealogy television serves less as a disorienting challenge to the celebrity’s public persona and more as a form of affirmation. In fact, beyond using genealogy to *make* ancestors through selective remembrance, as Zerubavel says, in the case of celebrity genealogy on television, ancestors are often presented in ways that appear designed to reflect the celebrity subject, with a newly discovered ancestor functioning as a mirror of the genealogical subject or at least some dimension of his or her identity. This is done by highlighting connections and affinities between

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the ancestor and the celebrity, whose characteristics are already well-known by many viewers. Such similarities range from mere coincidences to personal characteristics and to values and beliefs, but, in each case, the respective show strongly implies that there is a distinctive family connection that bonds the subject to the ancestor, regardless of the historical or biological distance between them. In this way, genealogy television uses what Kramer calls the “idiom of the family” to evade the many inevitable differences between the individual and the ancestor, as well as between the past and the present (Kramer, “Mediatizing Memory” 431). These differences of individuality are blurred and the gaps and ruptures of history are smoothed over as the newly discovered figures are declared part of the family, signaling a newly constructed collective identity, an “imagined community” of kin (Zerubavel 11; Bennett 7). In turn, the vast majority of the show’s guests, celebrities and otherwise, embrace the logic along with their new family, often echoing some version of the favorite refrain of the genre: “I have found my people.”

The trope that best exemplifies this blurring of the past with the present is that of physical resemblance. For example, in season 2 of *Finding Your Roots*, a segment on Pastor Rick Warren uses his resemblance to his great-grandfather Reverend Ebenezer Armstrong to this effect. Early in the episode, the show displays a picture of Armstrong, and Gates notes “how much Rick resembled Pastor Ebenezer” (“Angela Buchdahl, Rick Warren, and Yasir Qadhi”). As sociologist Jennifer Mason has argued, such resemblances among kin tend to be perceived to be “fixed affinities,” as they are easily associated with biology and seen as visual proof that certain traits have been passed down largely unchanged from one relative to another. However, *Finding Your Roots* uses the image to subtly imply that Warren’s identity is more deeply rooted even than this visual connection to his great-grandfather suggests. With the still photo of Armstrong filling the screen for a full 37 seconds, an unusually lengthy period of time for a still picture, Warren and Gates provide voiceover narration that goes far beyond “Pastor Ebenezer” and into Warren’s “long line of deeply religious ancestors,” which Gates explains leads all the way back to colonial Boston.

Thus, in this case, the physical resemblance between Warren and his great-grandfather, though striking, becomes the signifier for a much larger claim. This fixed affinity implies a continuum wherein Warren, a prominent religious figure today, is just the latest in this line of accomplished pastors that extends far back into history. On the contrary, the physical resemblance between Warren and his great-grandfather reveals nothing of substance about Warren's connection to colonial Boston, nor does it reveal anything about his similarities or differences to the other hundreds of ancestors between then and now to whom he is related.

Similarly, in an episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* ("Susan Sarandon"), the resemblance between Susan Sarandon and her grandmother, Anita, plays a key role in that segment's narrative. Like many episodes of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, this episode introduces a personal conflict in the celebrity's life and then offers a narrative of healing through genealogical discoveries and claims of ancestral affinity (Lynch 110-114). In this case, the story focuses on Sarandon's long absent and now deceased grandmother, Anita, who abandoned Sarandon's mother at the age of 2, and it constructs a healing narrative around character affinities and life choices that bring the movie star and her grandmother together. A former New York "showgirl," Anita is re-integrated into an ancestral continuum through the interpretation of her as "unorthodox" and a "risk taker" who performed on stage and entered into an unconventional relationship (in her case, a "mixed marriage"), all of which are descriptions that link her life to Sarandon's, who is known for her feminist politics and resistance to gender norms in her personal life, yet the story only comes to a conclusion after the discovery of a photograph that serves as a sign of fixed affinity. Presented with a glamour shot of Anita as a showgirl, Sarandon pairs it with a playbill head shot from her own past, and the two images, placed side by side on screen, appear strikingly similar, thus enacting a visual coming together of grandmother and granddaughter that signifies a healing of the fractured family through the recognition of shared traits.

As in both the Warren and Sarandon episodes, the very traits that distinguish the celebrity subjects in the public eye are typically

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the same traits that serve as the focus of their ancestor's tale, thus implying that their success is due at least in part to a family trait passed down to them. Indeed, this logic is evident in dozens of other episodes, with everything from professional inclinations to shared talents and abilities, like sports and music, and even to shared character qualities, such as strength and resilience becoming defined as a family trait that has been gifted to the contemporary subjects from their ancestors. For example, on *Who Do You Think You Are?*, just as Sarandon's risk-taking personality is portrayed as an ancestral trait, so is Vanessa Williams' barrier breaking, Ashley Judd's "rabble rousing," Kelly Clarkson's boat rocking, and numerous other subjects' self-proclaimed qualities, including "drive" (Emmitt Smith), spirituality (Gwyneth Paltrow), and an "entrepreneurial spirit" (Spike Lee and Tim McGraw, respectively). Furthermore, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* especially, there is little room for coincidence, as even such idiosyncratic decisions such as Brooke Shield's choice of a major (French), Matthew Broderick's movie selection (*Glory*), and Spike Lee's character name (Mars Blackmon) are portrayed as the mysterious hand of their ancestry acting upon them in their everyday lives.

While *Finding Your Roots* avoids this use of what Mason calls "ethereal affinities" (37) to construct ancestral narratives, it nevertheless also frequently suggests, though with more subtlety, that its guests' distinguishing qualities have been "passed down" through the generations and "molded [them] in ways they could have never imagined" ("Born Champions"), resulting in their contemporary "accomplishments [that] can be traced back" ("Barbara Walters and Geoffrey Canada") to various ancestors' characteristics, lives, and decisions. Still, on occasion, Gates' enthusiasm seems to get the better of him, and his propensity for subtlety is abandoned for more overtly reductive statements, such as the occasional assertion that "you are your ancestors" ("Samuel L. Jackson, Condoleezza Rice, and Ruth Simmons"; Miller). A statement such as this one, which insists upon a deep natural affinity between subject and ancestor, is exactly what makes the stakes so high when an inconvenient ancestor like Benjamin Cole is introduced. Indeed, how can one effectively disavow an inconvenient ancestor on a show that

insists that “you are your ancestors”?

The answer to this question is built into the format of genealogy television. Indeed, when it comes to the sensitive issue of a white celebrity’s slaveholding ancestors, *Finding Your Roots* and other genealogy shows try to have it both ways: to exploit the drama but also diffuse the awkwardness created by the revelation and protect the celebrity from any significant embarrassment. Thus, there are several common strategies that *Finding Your Roots* and other shows frequently use to diffuse the tension created by the introduction of inconvenient ancestors, and just like the pervasive affinity claims that make these tropes necessary, they too rely on selective remembrance.

For example, when inconvenient ancestors are introduced on genealogy television, they are almost always presented as singular or exceptional cases in the subject’s family history, suggesting that they were the lone ancestor who owned slaves. This focus on the inconvenient ancestor’s individuality avoids the implication that he or she may well be part of a more extensive pattern in a family history, as was often true with slaveholding, which was usually a multi-generation enterprise. Such is the case in Affleck’s original segment, which presents Cole in this way, despite the fact that he is described as an owner of more than twenty slaves, putting him among the 10% largest owners of slaves in 1850 (“Roots of Freedom”). With no broader historical context provided to explain a past or future relationship between Cole’s family and the institution of slavery, one may easily get the impression that he was the lone slaveholder in this particular branch of Affleck’s family tree.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Affleck either left the filming believing that Cole was the only slaveholder in his family history or that he conveniently adopted this view in the days that followed the public exposure of the suppressed Benjamin Cole story, as he states “After an exhaustive search of my ancestry . . . it was discovered that one of my distant relatives was an owner of slaves” (Affleck). Of course, his implication here is that the show must have looked far and wide to find one slaveholding ancestor. Yet, further genealogical research in the wake of the controversy suggested that Cole was no exception; rather, he was

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part of an extensive history of slaveholding in his family (Blue-stone). Furthermore, slavery appears to have been quite common among Affleck's ancestors more generally, with sources stating that slaveholding spanned four generations and included as many as 14 individuals who owned more than 200 slaves (Leahy). Thus, by selectively focusing on Cole, *Finding Your Roots* may have been significantly downplaying the extent of slaveholding in Affleck's family history. Still, it speaks to the difficulty of balancing the show's need for drama with its desire to comfort the celebrity guests that even this apparent effort to downplay the significance of slaveholding in Affleck's family history apparently was not enough to prevent him from feeling that the show was setting out to embarrass him.

Another common technique employed by genealogy television to lessen the blow of the discovery of inconvenient ancestors is to frame the celebrity's segment as a redemption narrative. This again was the approach taken in the original Affleck segment, and it also characterizes *Finding Your Roots* episodes with Ken Burns, Kyra Sedgwick, Kevin Bacon, and many others, as well as Zooey Deschanel's episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* In each of these cases, the inconvenient ancestor's story is juxtaposed with inspiring stories of other ancestors who fought for racial or social justice. These redemption narratives allow the subject to claim and even celebrate an alternative narrative, enabling the inconvenient ancestor to be more easily disavowed and forgotten.

For example, on *Who Do You Think You Are?* actor Zooey Deschanel learns that her fifth great-grandfather Thomas Henderson owned a slave, yet while startling to Deschanel, this fact serves as little more than a preface to the central story of the episode, that of Henderson's daughter, Sarah, who becomes an abolitionist and a participant in the Underground Railroad. An example of the selectiveness of genealogy in action, neither Deschanel nor the show ever again addresses Thomas Henderson after his relevance to the family line is dismissed with the simple statement by Deschanel that Sarah "must have taken after her mother," who did not bring any slaves into the marriage and grew up in an anti-slavery Quaker community. On the other hand, Deschanel also heaps praise upon

her abolitionist fourth great-grandmother, saying “I couldn’t have imagined I came from such heroes.” She further claims this selective ancestral history by highlighting her own progressive politics and asserting that seeing “how far back it goes is really exciting and inspiring” (“Zooey Deschanel”).

In *Finding Your Roots*, Gates even plays an active role in encouraging such interpretations. In Kyra Sedgwick’s segment (“Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick”), for example, a new twist is given to the well-established history of Theodore Sedgwick, a New England revolutionary and early abolitionist who is also her fourth great-grandfather. The revelation that Theodore Sedgwick once owned slaves effectively unsettles this treasured family history for Kyra and her father, and Gates even admits that he too was “flabbergasted” by this unknown piece of a well-known history. Yet, in Gates’ words, Theodore Sedgwick’s later actions in support of abolition prove “powerfully redemptive.” Similarly, in Kevin Bacon’s segment in the same episode, Gates again insists on a redemptive conclusion. Here Bacon’s inconvenient ancestor’s story is linked to another in his ancestral line, both of whom were Pennsylvania Quakers, though they were separated by three generations. Nevertheless, the actions of Bacon’s great-grandmother, who is revealed to have been a teacher of freed slaves during Southern Reconstruction, symbolically functions to redeem his earlier slaveholding ancestor. Summing up, Gates says, “Your family has come a long way, Kevin, since your sixth great-grandfather tried to hold on to those slaves.”

Similarly, the Affleck episode opens with a story about Affleck’s mother’s involvement in the Civil Rights movement, and in the original version, this story was to serve as a touchstone in his segment. As Gates puts it, Affleck’s mother, Chris Affleck, represents “the roots of his family’s interest in social justice.” Thus, following the Benjamin Cole slaveholding reveal, Gates urges Affleck to “consider the irony . . . in your family line,” noting that his mother would “[fight] for the rights of black people in Mississippi, 100 years later.” “That’s amazing,” Gates adds, and Affleck affirms this sentiment, saying “That’s pretty cool” (Bluestone). This redemption claim ultimately proved to be a rather significant exaggeration.

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Although Chris Affleck did go to Mississippi in 1965 and participated in civil rights activities in an atmosphere of extraordinary racial tension, she was not “there at the time” of the 1964 freedom summer, as Gates claims, nor was she “colleagues” with the three civil rights volunteers who were murdered in June 1964 (Getler). Thus, in this case, the show moves beyond selective remembrance and into the even more troubling territory of historical inaccuracy or distortion for the sake of the celebrity subject’s comfort with his family history.

One final strategy for diffusing the tension created by the inconvenient ancestor is the insistence that descendants bear no responsibility for their ancestry. “You are not responsible for your ancestors,” Gates often says at such moments in the show. On the one hand, this statement represents a well-accepted assumption not just in genealogy television but in genealogy in general. As the historian Edward Ball explains in *Slaves in the Family*, his classic and exhaustive study of both the slaveholders and the slaves in his own ancestry, “a person cannot be culpable for the acts of others, long dead, that he or she could not have influenced.” He adds, though, that, although not “responsible,” one should be “accountable, called on to try to explain it” (14). In contrast, the insistence that “you are not responsible for your ancestors” is used on genealogy television with no such caveat. In fact, it is merely a quick and easy way out of the awkwardness, a way to lessen the tension that has been built up through the “big reveal.” Furthermore, in Gates’ case in particular, the statement contradicts his insistence elsewhere that “you are your ancestors,” thus suggesting how conveniently ancestral connections are made and undone.

Still, even with these contradictions and evasions, genealogy television has the potential to do significant cultural work, and *Finding Your Roots* provides a good example of both the advantages and disadvantages of using this genre to try alter the popular cultural discourse or public history of slavery. An extension of the project Gates started with *African American Lives*, *Finding Your Roots* focuses on the central role of slavery in U.S. history, using public figures’ ancestries, and even his own family history, to illuminate a continuum that extends from the history of slavery into the present.

However, on Gates' prior shows, as well as in the less common cases when slavery is addressed on other genealogy programs, stories about slavery are limited almost exclusively to the genealogy of African-American subjects, with the discovered ancestors having been enslaved and their recovery representing a form of "reconciliation and repair" (Nelson 95). In turning an increased attention to white slaveholding ancestors, *Finding Your Roots* breaks from this convention and puts a spotlight on this rarely explored lineage in genealogy television, as well as in American culture in general.

In fact, this effort to draw a connection between contemporary whiteness and the history of U.S. slavery serves as a broader corrective to the routine evasions of slavery that have long characterized the heritage discourse. As Jacobson argues, the white ethnic revival of the 1970s provided an enthusiasm for "ethnic particularity" in genealogy research, and, as a consequence or perhaps even a cause, that new focus also contributed to the increasing obscurity of white slaveholding ancestors in genealogy over the past several decades. Ironically, Alex Haley's *Roots* and the subsequent mini-series helped to propel this turn to ethnicity in genealogy and even provided one of its core concepts, the romanticized non-U.S. homeland. Of course, in *Roots*, the tracing of an ancestral line to an African homeland requires a reckoning with slavery and the middle passage, while narratives focused on white ethnic origins typically follow a very different ancestral and historical path, leading not to slavery and slaveholders in the family history but to Ellis Island and immigrant ancestors. Thus, this shift signaled a redefinition of, in Jacobson's words, "normative whiteness" from "Plymouth Rock whiteness to Ellis Island whiteness" (7). In genealogical terms, this translates to an increased attention to the Ellis Island-type of ancestor, the late nineteenth or twentieth century immigrants whose roots are located in an alternative homeland, such as Ireland or Italy, from which they were likely forced to flee due to difficult or oppressive conditions. This attention comes at the expense of the "Plymouth Rock" ancestor, who signifies a claim to a national origin story but, as a consequence of that, also represents the "violent history of the settler democracy in the making long before the first immigrants of the . . . Ellis Island variety ever came ashore" (Jacobson 9).

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This cultural privileging of the Ellis Island ancestor may even have informed Ben Affleck's expectations about genealogy coming into his appearance on *Finding Your Roots*. In the opening interview of the show, Affleck explains that ancestry was "a blank canvas" for him, not something he had thought much about. However, when prompted by Gates to venture a guess as to what he may find in the process of researching his roots, thoughts of any ancestral link to slaveholders or any other inconvenient ancestors clearly do not cross his mind. Based only on his upbringing in Boston and its large Irish-American population, Affleck is quick to conclude it likely that "there's some part of that [Irish ancestry] there," thus comfortably locating himself within the dominant discourse of the ethnic revival. In this case, however, the comfort of claiming an Ellis Island ancestor was not to be, and the result of the research into his family history, instead, appears to have been, for him, one of considerable genealogical disorientation.

Others on the show have responded quite differently than Affleck, and some moments in the show even suggest, at least in a limited way, that it may, in fact, have the ability to affect the way some white Americans think about their relationship to slavery. For example, in contrast to Affleck, many other white celebrity guests in Season 2 of *Finding Your Roots* seem to anticipate their inconvenient ancestor's big reveal, apparently having watched the show before or been better prepped than Affleck was in coming on the show. Indeed, guests such as Kevin Bacon, Kyra Sedgwick, Anderson Cooper, and Ken Burns seem to see what is coming in these moments, exclaiming "uh oh" or "oh, no" in anticipation of it. In Bacon's case, he even jokes to Gates that "it did cross my mind," when asked if he was surprised by the revelation of slave owners in his family history, thus suggesting that it occurred to him precisely because the show so often addresses the issue and brings these ancestral continua to light. Thus, in this case, the pattern of remembering slavery in white family histories seems to have prompted the guest to think about slavery in a new way, prior even to having it dramatically exposed in the big reveal. If, as Jerome De Groot argues, celebrities' engagement with their family history on television comes to "stand for so many others" (440), then Bacon's

shift in awareness also may be indicative of the show's consciousness-shaping impact on many viewers as well.

In fact, on *Finding Your Roots*, white celebrities repeatedly respond to the story of their slaveholding ancestors by saying, "I've never heard that story before." In one such moment, Ken Burns thoughtfully adds, if "you don't talk about it, . . . the next generation forgets it" ("Our American Storytellers"). Likewise, on a rare episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* that focuses on a white actor's slaveholding ancestors, Bill Paxton states, "I want my children to learn this history, not hide the bad parts" ("Bill Paxton"). In such cases, genealogy television can help to provide a space to begin to talk about slaveholding ancestors and the legacy of slavery in general in a more personal way. As former Brown University President Ruth Simmons says in her segment of *Finding Your Roots* ("Samuel L. Jackson, Condoleezza Rice, and Ruth Simmons"), such efforts help to bring this discussion "into the public square." Ideally, though, these shows might push the conversation beyond taking comfort in feeling "not responsible" for the past. Rather, they may ultimately move subjects to embrace Edward Ball's assertion that one should be accountable to the past and engage in acts not just of remembering but also reflection and explanation.

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**Book Reviews**

Whiteley, Sheila, and Shara Rambarran. *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016. 720 pp.

This exhaustive anthology, edited by musicologists Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran, draws together thirty-one chapters over seven sections, in which authors offer a diverse array of perspectives on a hitherto nebulous yet endlessly fascinating area of study. We are presented with a thorough examination of music within the context of the virtual, “a term that gestures to liminal experiences that are ‘real, but not concrete,’ or sites of potentiality. It is also considered as a simulation of physical reality effected through technological means” (Shields 643). Technology is identified as central to, but not synonymous with, virtuality, the first section of chapters focusing on pre-digital themes and even touching upon some ancient considerations of music and virtuality—in ceremonial practice for example. Iconography, constructed reality, online community, and interactive technology are all examined within a musical framework and illustrated with discographies, case studies, and transcriptions. Concluding the book is an appendix chapter presented as a formative blog, a discussion between several authors retrospectively expanding upon the themes presented. Fittingly, a companion blog has been set up at [www.musicvirtuality.wordpress.com](http://www.musicvirtuality.wordpress.com), which is continually updated to maintain a topical discourse on virtuality. The editors have even extended the invitation to all visitors of the site to contribute.

The book has an additional significance with the passing of co-editor Sheila Whiteley in June 2015. Contributing author Benjamin Halligan has highlighted in discussion the enormity and diversity of this anthology and the difficulty of securing publication for such a work (Halligan). It is testament to Whiteley’s vision,

tenacity, and reputation within the musicological community that this ponderous task was accomplished.

From the first chapter, the assumed dichotomy of reality and virtuality is tested--Christian Lloyd defines the listening experience as inherently situated in the virtual but influencing the shape of reality. The idea of "the virtual" as external to "the real" is thenceforth weighed and challenged from various angles. As part of their chapter entitled "Nothing is Real: The Beatles as Virtual Performers," Philip Auslander and Ian Inglis raise the consideration of whether, through the construction of cartoon avatars for a series of televised broadcasts, the Fab Four built a new bridge to connect meaningfully with their fan base, overcoming the wall of noise they faced at live concerts as massed audiences descended into hysteria. Shara Rambarran's chapter analyzes the themes and evolution of modern virtual band Gorillaz, highlighting the escapist intentions of Damon Albarn as he sought to render his persona as the neurotic cartoon frontman 2-D and perform quite literally behind the scenes, only to ultimately abandon this offered effigy in favor of presenting himself in person to his audience during later concerts. Discussion then moves to constructed icons outside of the recording industry mainstream. A section of chapters on Second Life, the virtual reality online world first released in 2003, explores how web musicians connect with audiences and earn a living by streaming performances via their chosen avatars, while the discussion around Yamaha "vocaloids" examines how fans produce and release records and music videos using these synthesized pop icons. These are examples of what David Tough, in his chapter, terms "democratization" of recording industry practices. In the later sections, we see more examples of this manifestation of virtuality: the collective creativity of online communities and crowdsourced projects and the enhanced modes of interaction in social media and app music releases. Many chapters paint a picture of cohesion and connection facilitated by virtuality, the more active role of consumers in creative processes as they become mediators, remixers, and shareholders. Products of virtuality that fall short in some way are also presented, though with a constructive approach that belies an optimistic attitude, an attention to areas

for development rather than failures. In his chapter on independent micro labels, for example, Juho Kaitajärvi-Tiekso highlights a fascinating subversion of music industry practices that has thus far failed to find a sustainable funding model, raising the question of how progressive attitudes to music distribution might revolutionize an industry in decline.

The expectation when delving into these areas might be to encounter dystopian analyses of technologically-induced isolationism, the quality loss of analog ideas compressed into digital formats, and the plight of the human experience in an age of synthetic hegemony. This was certainly the caricature I had constructed in my mind before reading. However, as the perspectives presented in each section and chapter are weighed up, I found the tone of the book to be altogether more optimistic and encouraging. The themes prominently emerging from the text--interaction, connection, cohesion, and democratization--are a positive reflection on music and virtuality, while the invitation to keep the discussion going on the companion blog acknowledges that new ideas and contexts of relevance are continually emerging within this topic. This resonates with a quotation from Professor Whiteley's website, paraphrased from Kierkegaard: "Life is lived forwards and understood backwards. The mystery of where all the jigsaw pieces fit together is still unfolding and for that I am, and will always be, more than happy."

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Plasketes, George. *Warren Zevon: Desperado of Los Angeles*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 251 pp.

In *Desperados of Los Angeles*, author George Plasketes offers up an examination of Warren Zevon's musical catalogue that combines a scholarly analysis of his lyrics with a fan's appreciation of one of the unsung rock heroes to emerge from the fringes of the '70s' Laurel Canyon scene. Zevon's work deserves and withstands Plasketes' close reading and helps shed light on why Zevon described himself as a cross between Baudelaire and Johnny Rotten. It is also worth noting that *Desperados of Los Angeles* avoids the easy detours of typical rock criticism by allowing Zevon's work to stand on its own merits. Plasketes is diligent and thorough in bringing attention to Zevon's literary approach to songcraft without sugarcoating or dismissing the songwriter's early career bouts of alcoholism and bad behavior. In the world of rock music study, such close readings of lyrics exist for artists like Dylan and Springsteen, so it is refreshing and long overdue that Mr. Zevon's lyrics get the academic treatment.

Plasketes' approach is an earnest and well-researched effort, making the case that both the music industry and music fans have overlooked Zevon's importance as a rock-and-roll storyteller. Plasketes unpacks his argument by detailing how Zevon's musical virtuosity and his fondness for writers like Norman Mailer, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, Hunter S. Thompson, and Thomas McGuane did not translate into the kind of record sales and celebrity that guarantee a musical legacy or a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction. To illustrate the point, Plasketes juxtaposes the release of the Eagle's "Hotel California" with Zevon's 1976 release "Warren Zevon," revealing how Don Henley's worldview embraced "a rock-and-roll mythology and fast-lane lifestyle" much different from the "geomusical neighborhood noirvella" of Zevon's sophomore album (35, 25). Both albums were released within six months of each other. "Hotel California" would go on to sell more than 16 million copies in the United States. Plasketes is clear when he

points out that Zevon's album did not need to compete with "Hotel California's" success to establish Zevon's songwriting talents.

The majority of *Desperados of Los Angeles* depicts an artist respected by his peers and his various record labels but uncomfortable in his own skin. Plasketes is keenly aware that it is Zevon's intellect and lyrical prowess that separate him from other artists, and it is a consistent line through *Desperados of Los Angeles* that Zevon never falters as a writer. Plasketes delivers his most convincing conclusion on Zevon when he writes, "The unassuming brilliance of his contemplation lies in his ability to hauntingly tap into the cultural consciousness and collective curiosity" (101). Plainly, the author wants the reader to appreciate and understand how Zevon could turn scenes set in hotel rooms, bars, or restaurants into graceful and wry lyrical depictions of love, loss, or despair. Just as adroitly, Zevon could spin twisted tales of murder, mayhem, and international hijinks into three-minute radio-friendly masterpieces. Plasketes demonstrates how the juxtaposition of the sensitive with the violent, both frequently wrapped in sardonic humor, illustrates the duality of Zevon's genius and his problematic commercial appeal.

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Kurylo, Anastacia, and Tatyana Dumova, editors. *Social Networking: Redefining Communication in the Digital Age*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016. 189 pp.

Editors Anastacia Kurylo and Tatyana Dumova have collected a grouping of ten essays by authors from a myriad of academic fields and locations to create a comprehensive and thorough study of social media in *Social Networking: Redefining Communication in the Digital Age*. This cross-disciplinary examination, geared towards students and researchers focusing on new media, presents new perspectives on social networking sites (SNS) by focusing on how

social media plays a part in areas such as interpersonal communication, self-expression, cultural adaptation, and social change.

The Internet is shown to be a platform for activists, an opportunity for educational settings, a place for personal engagement, and a source of information in a time of crisis. For example, SNS during a disaster can perform the dual functions of sharing information and keeping the public informed. In the case of missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in March 2014, the commercial satellite company Tomnod provided images of potential rescue sites, and online users were able to view these areas from their home computers in hopes of finding pieces of the missing aircraft. SNS enabled everyday people to come together and feel as if they were helping do their part in a time of crisis.

From an academic standpoint, *Social Networking: Redefining Communication in the Digital Age* shows the reader how SNS is such a strong force in so many disciplines. A historiographic approach of SNS is also considered, using psychology, marketing, and information processing in its analysis. This is achieved through the history of bookmarking, including the actions of bookmarking a web site, the use of Tumblr, Amazon.com product reviews, tweeting on Twitter with the use of hashtags, and pinning images on Pinterest. The connection among these differing forms of SNS bookmarking is elaborated and creates an engaging thought process. Additionally, hashtag usage in Instagram is highlighted, as all photos with a specific hashtag are then visible to all users, expanding the audience.

The usage of SNS in an educational setting is also explored, concluding that students who engage in social media ultimately have an enhanced learning experience. A prime example of this is the creation of a LinkedIn profile, using the site as a place to elaborate on past work and educational experiences, enabling employers to view potential candidates. These are just a few examples of the vast amount of ground covered by the authors.

Due to the nature of a print book and the nature of rapidly evolving SMS, this compilation could have the tendency to become out of date quickly. For example, in the chapter on mobile social

networking, privacy issues merely are alluded to in the last few pages, while privacy issues are likely to be in the forefront going forward. Also, as more social media platforms are created, their exclusion from the text could become obvious. Since SNS is such an ever-changing field of study, it is nearly impossible to always remain relevant after a book has gone to print. However, up to this point in time, many crucial issues, such as transnationalization and networking for marketing gain, have been discussed and studied with great care.

Overall, *Social Networking: Redefining Communication in the Digital Age* advances communication theory by showing how digital media expands the traditional view of social networking. It will be useful for anyone interested in social media in relation to other relevant fields, both for those who are involved in the area of digital communication and those who perform scholarly research. In regard to scholars, this resource even discusses how academics are often stereotyped and considered displaced from the common experience of online interaction. However, this work disproves this belief and shows how all academics actually can benefit from the online experience of SNS and that the study is quite relevant in all fields.

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Lee, Julie. *Our Gang: A Racial History of the Little Rascals*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015. 328 pp.

The *Little Rascals* has experienced three lives; from the silent shorts of the 1920s, to the syndicated television show of the 1950s, and finally the film versions of the 1990s and 2010s, *The Little Rascals* has been a leading force in childhood entertainment. The series' enduring appeal demonstrates the universality of humor, but, as Julie Lee's *Our Gang: A Racial History of the Little Rascals* reveals, this success also underscores the nation's fascination with race and childhood. Lee's book traces the show's early days in the 1920s and '30s when the jazz age was in full swing and segregation shaped the American landscape. It is this latter fact that makes the gang so

interesting and so radical for its time--and again for its syndication in 1955, less than a year after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that banned racial segregation. Lee's experience growing up in California as the daughter of Korean immigrants influenced her interest in the show as she witnessed the incongruities of integration on the screen and segregation in the streets. The result is an entertaining and informative account of the show's popularity and continued influence on contemporary society. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s introduction relays his own experience as a fan of the show and attests to Lee's "unique access to personal archives and a keen sense of the broader historical canvas in which the series unfolded" (ix). *Our Gang* begins with a biography of the series producer, Hal Roach, and concludes with Lee's visit to meet Michael Hoskins, Allen "Farina" Hoskin's son in Northern California. The pages in between focus on the changing racial landscape of American culture and traces the series' critique of Jim Crow segregation and old-school stereotyping of African Americans. Through Lee's account, readers witness the show transform from merely slapstick comedy to a signifying critique of race relations of the 1920s and later the 1950s. As Lee points out, "this book tells the story of 'several gangs': from the series itself, and the men who helped create it, to the four African American stars, 'the gang within the Gang'" (xx). This telling reveals America's transition from Jim Crow, to Civil Rights, to Black Power, and finally to the inauguration of Barack Obama. *Our Gang* is a thoroughly researched account of changing (and static) attitudes about race, through a nostalgic lens of childhood memories--real and imagined. Lee's stylized telling--coupled with several photographs of the actors, show advertisements, and studio footage--breathes new life into a now-dated comedy and reveals the understated influence of *The Little Rascals*. *Our Gang* also includes a rich and exhaustive bibliographic essay for those readers who "wish to delve further into the theoretical and historical materials" that inform Lee's work (309). Lee's writing pulls the reader in, speaking to both academic and general audiences who are interested in deepening their understanding of American popular culture and the mirror it holds to society. *Our Gang* is both

an informative and entertaining treatment of delicate subjects and complex histories.

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Miller, Cynthia J. and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, eds. *Horrors of War: The Undead on the Battlefield*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 313 pp.

War is full of horror, not just physical horror but supernatural horror. *Horrors of War* investigates the mythic and popular culture depictions of the supernatural, including vampires, zombies, werewolves, necromancers, ghosts, demons, and other figures, in war. This edited collection offers an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates a variety of voices and uses a wide range of critical lenses.

The first grouping of essays, “Monstrous Enemies,” broadly examines how various texts cast and construct enemies as supernatural figures of horror. The first three chapters from this section consider how these texts, like *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Slayer, Twelve*, and *The Bloody Red Baron*, cast Confederate soldiers, mercenaries, Nazis, and other enemies as vampires. Chapter 4 closes this section and surveys cinematic depictions of Nazis as zombies, werewolves, mystics, necromancers, Satanists, mad scientists, and moon colonists.

Next, “The Dead Don’t Rest” follows the remembrance and presence of the dead as they haunt the living. Using Derrida, chapter 5 looks at specters as testaments to the violence of war, while chapter 6 looks at the haunting effects of trauma. The next chapter, examining DC Comics’ “The Haunted Tank,” focuses on the haunting effects and legacy of a masculinity that perpetuates war as noble. Chapter 8 looks at the boundaries between being and non-being, life and death, the mystical body and the mutilated body in *Deathwatch*. The last chapter of “The Dead Don’t Rest” argues that *A Carol for Another Christmas*, combining Victorian ghost story and

Cold War science-fiction, explores the possibility of peace in an increasingly militaristic and nuclear world.

The third section, “Making Monsters,” features essays that continue to look at the monstrous in war, and the first three chapters in “Making Monsters” consider how the monstrous or supernatural challenge nationalism. The first essay in this section looks at *Deathdream* and *House* for different depictions of and attitudes toward the “ghosts” or the monstrous underside of the Vietnam War. This chapter looks beyond a nationalistic remembering of the dead, one that merges unnamed soldiers, and considers alternative ways to engage and remember individual soldiers. Likewise, chapter 11 addresses nationalistic narratives, tracing how monsters, in Paul Wilson’s *The Keep* and Graham Masterton’s *The Devils of D-Day*, stand outside of and challenge “official” narratives and categories. Similarly, chapter 12 argues that the threat of supernatural presence in the 2002 film *Below* subverts traditional hero narratives and nostalgia. The section’s final chapter uses Lacan, monster theory, and game theory to survey the possible reasons behind the contemporary impulse to play Nazi zombie games like *Call of Duty*.

“Legacies and Memories” concludes the volume, tracing how texts recall past wars and weave these conflicts with supernatural myths. This section’s first chapter contends that, despite previous misinterpretations, the Japanese film *Kuroneko* and its demons call attention to the human casualties of war. Chapter 15 recognizes that the ghosts of the comic *Weird War Tales* missed the potential to offer a critique of nationalism in World War II and Vietnam; instead, the comic series presented a conservative message emphasizing American patriotism. The next chapter argues that the violence of World War II haunts Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone*, prompting the show’s deep interest in human morality amidst violence. Chapter 17 traces the spectral aspects of Jacques Tardi’s graphic narratives and how the form and features implicate readers in the war’s violence. Commenting on war’s violence but also domestic violence against women and children, chapter 18 concludes that the Korean film *R-Point* draws attention to Vietnam’s

colonialism and postcolonialism and revises the ghost girl trope to comment on East Asian film and politics.

*Horrors of War* represents a noteworthy examination of war studies, monster theory, and popular culture. Although the collection has many strengths, one major weakness is the brevity and lack of development in some essays. Many chapters include helpful summaries of either the particular wars or the discussed works, leaving little room for a developed and complete engagement with the chapter's argument. Still, because the work, with its eighteen essays, over fifty illustrations, and wide range of material covered, provocatively analyzes war in the popular imagination, I would suggest *Horrors of War* to scholars in history, religion, film, or literary studies fields.

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